



9
Kisses
Cherry 92

01 | One

Where It All Began

‘Well, I *am* jealous,’ Tiffany said. ‘I know I’m good too but... not when I compare myself to you guys.’

‘Seriously???’ I had to laugh and I too, turned to my stomach on the bed now, my arms propping me up to face her. ‘You think I’m a better dancer than you?’

‘Well... I don’t know, you just have something I don’t. The way you dance is really cute. Or really sexy. It depends,’ she fiddled with the corner of her pillow. I snorted in response. ‘For you, it’s like... it comes so naturally. And then there’s me and I have to put so much effort into trying to look “cute” or “sexy,”’ she quoted the words with her fingers, looking up at the ceiling, ‘and then I just mess up the choreo. And get scolded over and over again...’

Tiffany was not the type to complain a lot. If something went wrong, if she didn’t like things the way they were, she acted. To me, she talked about these little things too though, especially when she was drunk. And we definitely *have* drunk some tonight.

‘Look, Fany, we all have our weak points here and no-one simply gets away with anything when you’re at SM. When you’re a member of SNSD. So, first of all, you shouldn’t feel like you’re being picked on because everyone gets their good amount of scolding each and every time we mess up.’ She was staring at her pillow now. ‘You should know that better after such a long time.’

And then, secondly—who is it?’ her phone vibrated and I saw she received a new message.

She quickly opened it and ran through the message with her eyes, then she tucked the phone under her pillow. ‘Not important,’ she shrugged.

‘So, where was I?’ I lost track for a moment. As Tiffany was just about to open her mouth, I remembered. ‘Oh yeah, secondly... honestly, Tiffany, why do you want to force yourself to be something that you aren’t?’

Her eyes quickly darted at me, eyebrows raised high. ‘I’m not—?’

‘Wait. I’m not finished yet,’ I continued, knowing that she’d misunderstand if I didn’t. ‘I don’t know about *me* but... you *are* naturally cute and sexy. You don’t have to *try* to be. You *are* already,’ I looked into her eyes, trying to convey my sincerity through my gaze. ‘It’ll just make it seem forced if you try too hard. As for me, I don’t worry about that when I’m on stage. All I worry about is giving a good performance because that’s what really matters in the end, right? Everything else should come naturally.’

Tiffany’s lips slowly spread into a beaming smile, her eyes disappearing into their usual crescent shapes everyone envied so much. Add Kim Taeyeon to that list.

I stared back at her.

‘What?’ I asked.

‘You do realize you just called me cute and sexy, right?’ she wiggled her eyebrows at me.

‘Well, so did you!’

‘You do realize we just called each other cute and sexy, right?’ she said, still grinning. ‘Fans would go craaaazzy over this,’ she laughed.

‘Wow, you really know how to ruin the mood of a good courage-speech,’ I sighed and shook my head. I was actually proud of myself for putting my words together so well even though I was drunker than any time in the past six months.

‘No, I’m not ruining it! Your speech was...’ I looked at her from the corner of my eyes as she faked thinking about the right words, ‘cute and sexy! Totally, I mean, the way y—’

My palm landed against her mouth, while I supported my body on my elbow and used my other hand for tickling her under the blanket. She protested, trying to speak, but only muffled noises came out as my palm pressed against her lips. She laughed hard. I laughed heartily too, saying ‘next time you have a problem, this is how I will help you out, okay? No more boring speeches, no more midnight talks, just tickling and—’ She suddenly licked my palm. ‘Eww~ Gross! Are you a baby or what?’ I made a face.

‘Yeah, I’m a cute and sexy baby,’ she laughed and winked at me.

‘Well, take your cute and sexy saliva back to where it belongs then!’ I wiped my palm on the sleeve of her pajamas.

‘*Paa-ba-pabababa-paa-baa~ Sexy Droooooool~~*’ she started singing to the tune of “Sexy Boy” and made waves with her hands in front of her.

“*God, we’re drunk.*”

‘Hey Tae,’ she then put her hands down and turned to me. ‘Honestly, I love your cute and sexy speeches though. So, don’t you dare refuse to do it, ever, okay?’ she said, smiling sincerely.

‘Okay,’ I grinned back at her dorkily. ‘Not even if you don’t have any problems at all. Not even if we don’t even talk to each other anymore. I’ll stalk you. I’ll stalk your children. I’ll leave little notes on the bottom of your shoes and—’ I earned a hit on my shoulder.

‘Yah! Can’t you ever take me seriously?!’

‘How could I, when you’re so cute and,’ I started singing ‘*you’re so sexyyy sexy sexy~~*’ Tiffany came towards me with a fist, ‘No, I mean it, I swear, I swear!’ I pleaded.

‘Good,’ she said, lowering her fist and getting back into position.

‘Good,’ I replied to her fist.

She kept smiling at me, and I grinned back at her.

After a while, I realized she had some kind of a twinkle in her eye. A mischievous one. Surprisingly, instead of starting to think about what kind of mischief she was thinking of, I just mirrored her expression and felt like I shouldn’t break her gaze. I didn’t *want* to break her gaze.

She moved a bit closer. I did the same. There was no reason. I just did it.

She was still staring at me. I didn’t mind at all, I enjoyed staring back at her and I realized that both of our toothpaste-commercial smiles have faded into gently curving lips.

Her lips. Her teeth bit into her lower ones. “*Wait, when did my eyes move to her lips?*” I threw my gaze back at her eyes but hers were on my lips then, before coming back to look at me.

She leaned closer and I just realized what was happening, really.

“Is she going to—?”

Too late. Her lips already caught mine between hers and I couldn’t really think about whether I wanted this or not.

She didn’t hesitate to boldly make her way in between my lips as soon as she could, by pushing her tongue inside my mouth and it wasn’t that hard either when I come to think of it. I didn’t really put up much of a fight.

It felt nice, kissing her did. Honestly. People were always obsessed with how one’s lips or mouth or tongue or whatever tasted. But I was more interested in the texture, in the movements.

My mind felt numb enough even before with the amount of alcohol I inserted into my system but now it appeared as though the valiantly fluid movements of her plump, fleshy lips, her tongue, against mine, have erased all the remaining thoughts too.

“Wow she’s good at this!” I thought.

Our position was not the most comfortable. My shoulders started to ache and my neck felt a bit twisted. I didn’t care. I didn’t feel like pulling away.

Tiffany seemed to be running out of breath but her lips took mine again and again sternly. I

heard her phone vibrate again. My shoulders really hurt. Especially my left one. Instead of just simply stopping, I wanted to give one last try to win the battle our tongues were having, pushing against her hard, getting deeper, so much so, she was pushed back on the bed a bit. She stopped before I could've finished.

I felt as if walking through a waterfall to see the other side of the world when I heard our lips smacking once we moved apart.

With both of us breathing as if we just ran the marathon, my mind hastily struggled to process what just happened.

'Tiffany, wha— why??' I asked with wide eyes, shifting a bit to get rid of the pain in my shoulders. I didn't know what to think. About what she just did. I mean, what *we* just did.

'I don't know...' her voice went up a little at the end of the sentence, making her sound very casual as she turned to pick on the corners of her pillow once more. 'Does there...' she looked up into my eyes, raising her eyebrows slightly, 'have to be a reason?'

"I don't know. Does there?"

'No... I guess not...' I replied dumbly. Then I paused for a moment. This was still too confusing to me. You don't just go around making out with your friends after several years of friendship, right? 'But... still...'

'Okay, I know, it's weird but... don't overthink it. It's just what it is, right? Kissing,' she stated quite simply. 'We both enjoyed it.' Another statement. Not a question. Not an apology. Not even a belated request for permission.

But she was right in what she said.

I just had to agree.

'Okay,' I replied.

'Alright,' she said.

"Should it really be this simple? Just kissing?" I wondered.

I decided to shrug it off. Like she said, there's no need to over think it, right?

'Anyway,' Tiffany continued. 'Do you think the style they suggested for tomorrow's show will be okay? I really don't know about it.'

'Well, *I* personally think it looks a bit like a kimbap with all the little fringes and stuff in the middle...'

We talked for a while about some trivial and less trivial things, then said our good-nights and fell asleep, knowing we would have about four more hours till tomorrow, which counted as pretty good in our case.

It was a nice day.

02 | Two

Taking A Short Break

‘Hey guys, let’s make some patbingsoo before we continue, who’s with me?’ Sooyoung asked as she got up to her feet.

‘We barely even started,’ Seohyun protested. She was right. We were about to discuss some things about recording these couple of new songs we were given just when Sunny and Hyoyeon came up with the idea that we should get some drinks. Once we did, the conversation was diverted to very different directions and we only began to finally talk about the songs a few minutes ago. ‘We can just eat patbingsoo after, no?’

‘It’s no good to discuss these things with an empty stomach though,’ Yoona replied. ‘Come and help,’ she said as she headed towards the kitchen along with Sooyoung and Yuri.

‘It’s no good to eat patbingsoo after drinking alcohol, either, in my opinion, unnie.’

‘Well, we’ve got to eat *something*,’ I heard Sooyoung’s voice come from the kitchen. I was just setting my background image on my phone to this cute picture my sister sent me. “*I wish I didn’t just see her through a screen all the time...*” ‘And it’s pretty hot today too. It’ll be nice.’

‘Yah, you little Ggukgguki, don’t make your unnies work alone!’ Hyoyeon randomly added without looking up from the screen of her phone.

Seohyun sighed a little but then decided to comply with her unnies’ wishes and followed them to help with making the delicious summer dessert.

I got up too, arranging my papers on the floor that contained some lyrics, notes and music scores before doing so, and walked into the kitchen, checking the cupboard to see if we had any corn flakes. “*Oh, of course we don’t. Great.*” Yuri was laughing at something Sooyoung and Yoona was doing behind my back.

‘Guys, we don’t have any corn flakes,’ I announced. ‘Some cherry tomatoes would also be nice...’ I added, mumbling.

‘I’m gonna call my mom and ask her to get some,’ Sooyoung turned around clumsily.

‘No!’ Sunny said, suddenly peeling herself out of Jessica’s backhug and getting up to her feet too. ‘Do you want her to see us drunk?’

‘Well, I’m not that drunk.’

‘Oh yeah? Is that why you almost fell over when you turned around just now?’ Sunny replied sarcastically and Sooyoung released her grip on the kitchen counter. ‘I think the only ones still

holding up are Yuri, Juhyun and me.'

'And Fany,' I added, putting my phone on the floor beside me as I moved to sit back to the spot where I was before.

'No, I think she drank a bit more than we did so... she seems pretty wasted too.'

'Oh.'

Sunny was better at telling, I guess, than I was. Honestly, I didn't need much to get drunk so once I drank some, it was harder to judge who was also drunk and who wasn't. Sunny was always better at observing these things since she was good at holding her liquor. Tiffany was, too. Usually. But even if she did get drunk, it wasn't as easy to tell in her case as with the others, as there were no such obvious outward signs in her behavior as with Yuri or Hyoyeon, let's say.

Anyway, I swore I would try to pinpoint the signs of her being drunk this time, I don't know... just for future reference. Once she comes back from the bathroom. If Sunny says she's drunk, I believe her.

Hyoyeon was still on her phone, texting someone and laughing by herself.

'Okay, so you guys go out for corn flakes and tomatoes then and we'll prepare the rest,' Sooyoung said.

'No, I think at least one relatively sober person should stay so you won't mess up everything,' Sunny replied. I sprawled out on the floor and chuckled to myself because the ceiling seemed to be spinning a bit. *"I wonder what it'd be like to do this under the stars once. It must look pretty cool."*

I heard Tiffany's singing as she came back to the living room. She was in a very good mood, singing to herself what she would call "quietly". I smiled to myself. *"Sign number one?"*

'... Taengoo, you wanna come?' I realized Sunny and Seohyun were already in their shoes; I heard the others busy in the kitchen and Hyoyeon was just walking towards her room with the phone on her ear.

I wobbled up to my feet unsteadily. 'Yeah, su—'

'No, Taeyeonnie's staying with me,' I heard a slightly whiny voice from behind me and a pair of arms wrapped around my waist soon. I never really considered this before, but Tiffany was touchier when drunk, for sure. *"Sign number two."*

'Yah! Let go, wife, I wanna get ice cream too!' I struggled a bit in her arms.

‘No, you’re staying. You’re gonna eat patbingsoo anyway, dork,’ she tightened her hold a bit.

‘Aisssh~’ I breathed out heavily, then held her hands while she put her chin on my shoulder.
‘Okay.’

‘So you’re staying?’ Sunny asked.

‘It’s not like I have a choice,’ I replied, ‘this monster is keeping me captive.’

Tiffany chuckled evilly and swayed to the left and right, swinging my body along with hers. It didn’t do much good to my stomach now...

‘Sica-yah~!’ Sunny called out. ‘You wanna come shop with us?’

‘Yep, going~’ Sica lazily made her way out of the kitchen and threw a look at me and Tiffany on the way.

I don’t know what I saw in it but it was not just a regular look.

I glanced sideways at Tiffany, clueless, and she just shrugged and placed her chin back on my shoulder.

We said our goodbyes together as everyone left the room, then I got out from her hug to leave for the kitchen. But before I could even take a step or turn around properly... or even put together my thoughts for that matter, I felt her spin me around by the wrist and she pressed her full lips against mine, releasing her grip on me.

‘Mmmm!’ I tried to protest, tried to pull away from her lips but only for a moment which was not enough since she latched herself on me pretty well. Then I realized there was no need to do so. I was just shocked at the sudden contact.

The hands that were ready to push Fany away froze in mid-air.

“I think... her tongue... turns something off in my brain,” I mused because, really, all I could concentrate on was how strongly or feebly she pushed hers against mine, how I should try to taste her more, or wrestle her tongue down with my own... *“And it must turn something else on in me too, for sure...”* I smiled to myself. I was enjoying this a bit too much now and was wondering why the hell one would feel a desire to shove her tongue down another person’s throat. Okay. That’s a bit too harsh to say. Although... the past couple of experiences I had with guys would basically qualify as such an effort. Still, with Tiffany, this weird dance battle of lips and tongues seemed much more satisfying and at the same time not “satisfying” at all because it kept leaving me want more and more of it.

I heard a clattering noise from the kitchen and the girls started laughing. Sooyoung was shouting something I could not catch over the noise and the thought that suddenly intruded my

mind. *“Oh, crap. What if they’re gonna see us like this?”*

I hummed against Tiffany’s lips, trying to break the kiss one more time, but she was just as persistent as I was at dominating her mouth just a moment ago, not letting me get away that easily.

She kept the kiss going for a bit longer.

While slowly dragging her tongue out of my mouth, sliding it over mine teasingly as she did so, she kept our lips firmly attached for another few moments before finally releasing mine from between hers.

And she smiled at me. That mischievous one again.

Immediately, the question that was somehow there but at the same time, not exactly, right from the beginning, emerged in my head again.

‘Uh... what was that for?’ I asked sheepishly, finally lowering my hands.

Her eyes rolled slightly upwards in thought as if she was trying to read her brain to find the appropriate answer. ‘I don’t know... Thanks, I guess?’ she finally shrugged and sat down on the couch.

‘Thanks... for what?’ I stared at her, not understanding.

‘Mmm...’ her pupils went to the upper corner of her eyes again, looking for a response as she turned the TV on. ‘For staying here, with me!’ she replied in the end, her eyes smiling along with her whole face. Then she turned to look at the screen.

“Okay, what kind of a game are you playing here.”

‘You made me!’ I exclaimed and she turned her gaze on me again.

‘Exactly,’ she winked and her grin grew even wider. It looked extremely cute. Her nose was slightly red. *“Sign number three?”*

I was simply incredulous and puzzled.

‘You make no sense to me, woman, whatsoever...’ I sighed, shaking my head as I sat down next to her and gave a lazy wave of the hand, gesturing I was giving up on figuring her crazy ways out.

‘Hey guys, you wanna make prank calls?’ Hyoyeon appeared right on cue in the living room and waved her phone in her hand towards us.

‘You bet I do!’ I replied enthusiastically, taking the phone from her hand rightaway.

‘Ahh, seriously?’ Tiffany rolled her eyes.

‘Hey, never underestimate the opportunities lying in a good prank call,’ I scolded her.

Yoona came out of the kitchen.

‘Did I hear something about a prank call?’ she grinned, munching on a half-done bowl of patbingsoo in hand.

We ended up doing four prank calls and it only took two for Tiffany to get into it too. Once Sunny, Jessica and Seohyun came back, we were ready to eat our delicious patbingsoo and continued our discussion from where we left off.

Only later did I realize how strange it was that we just casually ended up making out for the second time in the past month and how natural it seemed to me at the same time.

I glanced over at about forty degrees from me into the circle the nine of us formed.

Tiffany’s lips looked very kissable.

03 | Three

To Keep Tiffany Silent

She was much too loud for my liking again. The other girls seemed bothered too.

‘Tiffany, can you please lower your voice a bit?’ I grumbled as I walked past Tiffany’s room.

‘Huh?’

I stepped back from making my way into the bathroom.

‘I said, please lower your voice. And the music. Some of us would like to go to sleep.’

Tonight’s party was definitely not the best I’ve been to. I was already grumpy back there and I was on my period anyway so feel free to multiply it by some. I may have looked at her in a bit more hostile way than I intended. Whatever.

‘But it’s only midnight!’

‘Only midnight?’ I stepped into the room and turned the music off. ‘Sunny, Yuri and Yoona wake up at four tomorrow.’

‘Well, aren’t they already in bed anyway? They skipped the party too—’

‘Doesn’t matter Tiffany, you’ll be waking them up.’

‘What’s your problem, honestly? Obviously, the others aren’t bothered by my voice—’

My words were barely audible now, ‘I wouldn’t be so sure about that if I were you.’ Seriously. That sounded mean. She shot me a look and I immediately recoiled like an obedient puppy to their dungy little dog house. ‘Sorry,’ I mumbled, looking away as I sat down next to Fany’s bed, on the floor. I don’t know why, I was originally about to go to the bathroom... Anyway. I’ll just stay a bit.

‘Are you taking things out on me again?’ she asked, slowly lowering herself to sit down next to me.

I tended to do that. More than anyone else here, I tended to treat her like a real family member, sometimes becoming a bit too blunt and open with her, acting as if no-matter-what, we would always be okay in the end, since we’re bound together for good anyway. That was not the case though. She might have felt like real family, but at the end of the day, she wasn’t. Despite this, I knew she could never leave me and I knew she would always forgive so, many times, I was taking her for granted and that resulted in unnecessary fights and tears that needn’t have been shed.

I tended to do that. I tended to take it all out on her.

This time, I really wasn't, though. *"I mean, I know I'm not in a good mood but I was right, she was too loud, I saw Seohyun's expression too, she just wouldn't say anything."*

'I know...' she continued, sighing after my stubborn moments of silence, 'I'm sometimes a bit too loud,' *sometimes*, she said, *sometimes*... I just had to snicker to myself a bit, 'but you've been acting mean about it too.'

'Mean, how?' I cocked my head up to look at her. She was pouting in an adorable way, I now saw, a complimentary frown added to the cute little dimple that formed on her chin.

'Like, I don't know, just like now?' she said.

'All I was saying is to not disturb the others...' I knew I could've used a nicer tone though. Then again, she could've just not argued with me in the first place.

'You know, some people love this voice s—'

'I like your voice too. But maybe sometimes... I'd rather you were silent.'

She nodded. 'Like now.'

'Like now and maybe some other times.'

'And what's *that* supposed to mean, Kim Taeyeon?' she stared at me through a fierce gaze.

I flashed a mischievous grin and winked at her, poking her thigh once.

"Kim Taeyeon's ultimate attempt to save the day. Act dorky."

She seemed to immediately get what I was thinking of. Of course, I was just trying to joke but apparently, she took it totally seriously, her expression quickly changing from surprised to the usual mischievous, then to one I could not really decipher. But it looked determined.

She leaned closer.

'Like this?' she swiftly took my lips between hers.

My mind went numb again.

I can't even say she forced her way into my mouth because I totally let her do what she wanted.

But after a bit of pushing and intruding, my brain finally caught up with me and I decided I

would not give in that easily. My tongue came alive and my lips supported its every effort in this little battle we were having.

I supported my whole upper body's weight with my palms flat against the warm wooden floor. *"It's obvious the cleaning lady hasn't been here for a couple of days now... ahh, my hands are dirty now..."*

Tiffany did not give up the fight easily either though. She never really was the type. She pressed her soft lips against mine firmly and once I attacked, ready to take over her territory, she sucked on my tongue, then quite abruptly, she finished off with a small bite on my lower lip.

My whole mouth was tingling.

'Yeah,' I replied with a small delay, wiping my mouth with the back of my hand, 'something like this.' It had a bit of Tiffany's saliva on it now. 'Now look what you did!' I showed her the back of my hand and shoved it in her face.

'What,' she backed away from my hand. I swept off the little dirt I had on my palms. 'Couldn't say you were much better than that,' she snorted, wiping the corner of her mouth with her thumb. Honestly, it looked kind of sexy when she did that.

'Well, I wasn't the one attacking you in the first place!'

'Attacking you?' she furrowed her eyebrows and her eyes turned to shape an upturned smile. 'Well, if you took this as an attack... then you surrendered way too easily,' Tiffany laughed and flicked my forehead.

'Next time I'm alone, drunk, with you, I'll make sure to bring my AK-47.'

'You'd better,' she smirked.

'Llama.'

'Baby.'

I knew we had made up with that.

And you know, in retrospect, I kind of wish we would've discovered this way of doing so earlier. Like that time when we fought over which one of us could wear that jacket that day...

For another few minutes, we continued our little chat with Seohyun and Sooyoung joining in soon, then we all decided it was time for bed and went our separate ways.

I headed for the bathroom first before entering Sunny's and my bedroom as slowly and

noiselessly as I could. I kept thinking about those scenes in comedies where you step on a banana peel or a very loud quacking rubber duck while I carefully tiptoed to my bed.

‘So you two made up?’ Sunny mumbled as I sat down on my sheets.

‘Sorry, did we wake you up?’ I took out my pajamas from under the pillows.

‘Nah, I just couldn’t really sleep...’ she replied with a sigh, propping herself up by the arm. ‘I was thinking about the performance and practice and all that...’

‘Hmmm.’

‘So? Did you guys say sorry to each other and weep your hearts out again and all that?’

‘No, not really...’ I paused for a moment, considering if I should tell Sunny what’s really happened. ‘Sunny?’

‘Hmm?’

‘We made out.’

Like a rocket she jumped up from beneath her sheets, eyes wide in shock.

‘WHAT?!?!’ Now *she* was the one being too loud.

‘Sunkyu-yah! Shhhhhh!’

‘What do you mean you made out?!’

‘Wow, it’s really not that big a deal, it’s not like this was the first time...’ “*Why am I telling her all this? Shouldn’t the alcohol be evaporating from my system already or something?*”

‘What do you mean it’s not the first time?’

‘It’s not,’ I shrugged and took off my rather tightly fit cocktail dress. It wasn’t the first time we did it and it wasn’t the first time that two members had kissed either, I knew that. Alcohol and loneliness make you do stupid things sometimes.

‘Aren’t you two taking this TaeNy thing a bit too seriously?’

‘What? Pfft. That’s got nothing to do with this.’ I threw the dress in the basket where my dirty clothes belonged to and noticed that it had some of Sunny’s clothes on top. “*Aish, she should be emptying hers out more frequently instead of using mine.*”

‘Sunny, your dirty clothes—’

‘Yes, I’m gonna do it tomorrow...’ she waved a dismissing hand towards me. ‘Well, why didn’t you tell us?’

I stopped halfway-through putting on my pajama top.

I was surprised at this question even though I should’ve seen it coming.

‘Am I supposed to tell you every time I hug or hold hands or kiss with someone?’ It was out of genuine curiosity I asked this. Really. I didn’t think it was something I was supposed to tell them.

‘Hug? No. Hold hands? Not really. Kiss? Definitely. Especially if it’s Tiffany.’

‘Hey, wait. Don’t be like that. Don’t make it look like I’ve been keeping this a secret. I wasn’t. I just didn’t feel like it was necessary to tell everyone.’ I finished putting on my pants too now.

‘Well, you could’ve at least told *me*.’ Sunny followed me with her eyes as I slipped under my sheets.

‘You’re saying this as if this was some kind of big news,’ I reached for my green, frog shaped contact lens container. ‘It isn’t.’

‘Really? So how many times did it happen?’

‘Umm... third time tonight?’ Sunny’s hanging jaw was enough for me to decide not to let her speak before I’d say anything more. ‘But we were drunk all three times!’

‘Is that supposed to be a positive thing?’ she raised an eyebrow.

‘No, but I mean, I never really considered doing it when sober,’ I took out my first lens and rolled back the lid on top. ‘I’m sure Fany didn’t either,’ I said, as I repeated the process one more time, on the left eye.

‘Are you planning to do it again?’

‘Planning to? I’m not planning to do anything.’ I let my body be completely burrowed by the warm and soft sheets at last. ‘This is not like... there’s no “TaeNy’s drunken special stage Plan A-B-C...”’

‘So what, you just randomly and spontaneously end up all over each other li—?’

‘Yah! No touching! There’s no touching and we don’t end up “*all over each other*”.’ The absence of any physical contact other than our mouths connecting became kind of an unwritten rule, I suppose, for us, that we both unconsciously kept ourselves to. Usually, we would be

comfortable, or rather, even fond of any kind of physical contact. Hell, I even massaged her half-naked when she had that evil sun-burn. No problem. But there was a great difference between *that* and kissing and touching her at the same time. That would feel like going too far. Like wanting to make it more. At least, for me.

Also, only one kiss allowed. ... Well, breaking apart to take a breath did not count as finishing a kiss, right? So that was okay. But once a kiss was finished, it would be weird if we continued with a second or third or who knows how many other ones.

‘And it’s not like we do it for very long either...’ I continued saying out loud my train of thoughts before she would even have the chance to accuse me of anything. *"Basically, I think we just never did stuff that could lead to a misunderstanding. Like Fany said the first time, it was just plain kissing that we both enjoyed. Just another thing the two of us did as a sign of friendly affection."* ‘... just one kiss at a time allowed.’

‘Allowed?’ Sunny tried to hold in her laughter. ‘Are you keeping a rulebook too?’

‘Shut up.’

She sighed as she sank back into her warm blanket. ‘You’re a fool.’

‘Am not.’

‘You are. Good night.’

‘Yeah, good night.’

That night, I went to bed with many thoughts in my head of our next performance two days from then. There were still many things to fix in the choreography and our costumes still needed fitting too. Sunny kept mixing up the lyrics... *“Ahh, so many things and so little time... But it’s always like this, isn’t it?”* I listened to my roommate’s weird noises as she made those strange sounds that reminded me of an old lady about to pass away.

Seriously, my talking was weird?!?!

04 | Four

At The Hotel

I laid on the grass and stared at the night sky, the stars shifting a little constantly in unruly circles as if following some kind of a rhythm.

‘*Geuraeyo nan neol saranghae eonjaena mideo,*’ I started singing to the sky and the stars danced along to my not-so-silent singing. “*I knew this was an awesome idea!*”

‘Taengoo-yah, what on earth are you doing?’ I heard Sunny’s voice nearing me.

‘Singing, of course, what else!’ I looked at the little “waving light sticks”. “*Just like a concert,*” I thought.

‘Okay, let’s get up now,’ she extended both arms to help me up from the ground. ‘If we were anywhere near people right now, you’d be in *so* much trouble, you know that, ri—?’ and with a big tug – by the hands of no other than this genius here, at your service – she landed on the ground, and... well, half her body on top of me. Ouch.

‘Gosh, what is wrong with you, girl?’

I pointed up at the sky for her to see my amusing discovery too. ‘See? The stars are SONEs too! We’re conquering the outer space now, the n—’

‘Alright, good, good, it’s really a dream come true,’ she interrupted dismissively and got off of me. ‘Now come on, get up, I think the others are already in the vans.’

‘Aish~’ I whined as I struggled up to my feet in probably the most unbalanced way I possibly could and swept the dirt off my knees and butt. ‘You didn’t even look,’ I grumbled. Sunny did not seem to hear it.

‘Finally,’ I heard Hyoyeon say. ‘It’s like we’ve been waiting for you since the day King Sejong was born! I really need to pee,’ the girl announced as soon as she saw us nearing the cars.

We really were lucky that we weren’t recognized as easily here as back in Korea. I just saw a group of teenaged students pass by our cars without giving us a second glance. At the same time, I wished for more success and recognition in this beautiful country as well.

‘What, you guys were there by the path too like two minutes ago!’

‘Two minutes is a long time when you really have to go, you know.’

‘Yeah, I know, sorry, but look!’ I pointed at the sky again enthusiastically, but Hyoyeon was already getting in the car. ‘Hey, birthday oppa, which van?’ I half-yelled to manager oppa who

stood about two meters from me but because nobody seemed to hear me before...

‘This one,’ I heard Tiffany’s voice come from the van further from me before manager oppa could’ve uttered a word. She stood by the side of the white vehicle, waiting for me to get in. She liked to sit at the front.

‘Fany, look, SONE!’ I held my index finger up towards the sky once more as I wobbled to our van.

She followed my fingers with her eyes, then laughed audibly and said, ‘they follow us everywhere, right?’ while still smiling at me widely.

Before I would’ve stepped in the car, I shouted to Sunny as she was about to get in to their own too, ‘See? She looked! She looked.’

And even though I felt kind of sick with the road from the park to our hotel apparently upgraded to a rollercoaster-ride, I grinned to myself before falling asleep at the backseat of the car.

‘Taetae~ wake up,’ I felt someone nudging my shoulder and heard a few raspy coughs. ‘We’re here,’ the voice lowly announced. I opened my heavy eyelids and groped around to get my bag.

Tiffany got out of the car and I clutched at her arm as soon as my feet touched the ground, with me feeling as if I was going to plummet towards the ground like a meteor had I not held onto something.

We headed for the hotel lobby, the little walk making my sense of balance return to somewhat normal. All the others were still waiting - Hyoyeon especially impatiently, I noticed - and discussing the room arrangements.

It seems like only Fany and I have been planning ahead.

‘Can I get a key for Taeyeon and me?’ I heard Tiffany ask as she walked to manager oppa who had four keys in hand.

Sunny looked at me with a raised eyebrow then. I didn’t understand what that was about so I just mirrored her questioning expression.

‘Okkkayy, well, you know what you’re doing,’ she shrugged.

I just thought, “*Sunny’s becoming stranger and stranger by the day.*”

Tiffany was sitting on the floor by her opened suitcase when I came out of the shower, her schedule planner open, sitting on a stack of shoes wrapped nicely so that they'd be kept safe along the road. She was reading a book on her iPad and she was probably too occupied with it to finish taking her stuff out as she usually would, and just started reading it mid-way in packing, sat on the floor with her legs folded.

I myself could never really get into these books. Or dramas for that matter. I liked games and movies much more. They were just more exciting to me, to be honest.

I went to my own luggage to get my pajamas, a pair I hadn't really used before, I just got it recently from a fan. I threw my towel off and got into my night wear. They were a nice choice. Very soft and fluffy.

I sat down next to Fany then, while applying some cream on my face and my hands.

I didn't say a word, I just waited and waited for her to realize that I'm there, wanting her to finish reading so that we could go to bed already.

After a few minutes of her just turning the pages on the little device and coughing every once in a while, I finally said, 'wow, that was a really nice chapter there, can we go to bed now?'

She looked up at me then. 'Oh, I got the same kind,' she said instead of answering my question as she pointed at my blue night outfit splattered with pictures of little... *"umm... what are they called again? Goats... geese... Oh! Sheep! Yeah, they're sheep. Sheep are very cute."* 'Mine is pink,' she added with a proud smile at the end of the sentence.

'What a surprise!' I grinned. 'I thought you said your favorite color was taeyeonsaek*!' [wordplay: eg. hayansaek=color white -> taeyeonsaek=Taeyeon-color]

'Yeah, cuz you blushed and you were pink!' she grinned, then cleared her throat a few times.

'I didn't blush, I was hot,' I protested meanwhile.

'You were hot because you were embarrassed, honey.'

'I wasn't.'

She gave me a look of disbelief accompanied with a crooked little smile.

'Maybe a little,' I admitted childishly, folding my arms across my chest.

She was referring to this time when I was a bit buzzed and I thought she was going to kiss me again when she leaned in for this cocktail, which was pink by the way, and, well... on instinct, I closed my eyes. But as soon as I felt that the lights were not blocked from me anymore, I

opened my eyes and realized that I totally misunderstood the situation. Turns out she wasn't even drunk that time.

'Taeyeon-ah? If you were a guy, who would you date out of us?'

'I don't know, why are you asking?' I turned my head towards her.

'Well, I'm curious. We've been asked so many times and I've never heard you reply before.' Yeah, well that's true. I think the last time we were asked this was like... two or three days ago? But I wasn't the one to reply, as usual. 'And I've answered a few times already so...'

'Yeah, and you always pick someone different too! You're a total player,' I teased.

'Tch. Yeah sure,' she rolled her eyes. 'No, really, it's just that... I just choose according to who I think Tiffany Hwang *as a guy* would like. And... since the members change over time too...'

'Hmm,' I hummed as I closed my eyes and rested the back of my head on the bed.

'Are you not telling me cuz you'd choose me?' Tiffany asked, and I heard her smile widely as she did so. 'You know, I wouldn't misunderstand it or anything,' she grinned cheekily. I could hear it in her voice but I refused to open my tired eyes. 'People say we're quite compatible anyways.'

'Yeah,' I scoffed, 'the same people think I'm most compatible with butts, so...' Tiffany sniggered. 'Don't laugh.'

'Okay. So?'

After a few moments of confusion over what we were just talking about, I finally blurted out 'Myself?' and looked at her when all I heard was silence. I knew that look in her eyes. 'What? I really haven't thought about it yet! And anyway, I'd have to be a really great guy to actually get to date any other SNSD member so... maybe *I* would be a bit more achievable.'

'That's stupid,' again, Tiffany rolled her eyes. 'Other than yourself then, who would you date?'

I sighed. 'Well, obviously apart from you, I guess I would either choose Hyoyeon or Yoona...' she was about to interrupt before I could even finish my sentence but I didn't let her. 'No. Maybe just Yoona cuz Hyoyeon wants to create like a whole new K-pop group of babies so... Yeah. I don't want that.'

'Yeah, like, doesn't she want at least a little rest in her life once we're not living this lifestyle anymore?' Tiffany put her iPad down, shaking her head. 'She's crazy.'

'Mmm.' The back of my head landed on the bed once more as I slipped my body downwards a little on the floor, shutting my eyelids.

Fany cleared her throat again and I felt her head rest next to mine on the mattress.

‘What are you trying to get at though? Why “apart from me”?’

‘Huh?’

‘You said, obviously apart from me... what does that mean?’

‘It means,’ I mumbled sleepily, ‘you’d be too busy with work to take good care of me. And you can’t cook for me either, so...’

‘What?’ my eyes snapped open instantly at her loud voice. She gaped at me incredulously, lifting her head up properly again. ‘Is that what’s important for you, Kim Taeyeon? And what do you mean I’d be too busy to take care of you? When did I ever—’

‘Whoa whoa whoa Tiffany, that’s totally not what I’m saying,’ I stopped her just in time before she could rip my head off with her glare. ‘I’m saying that *if* I were a *guy*, I’m sure I’d want my girlfriend to cook for me. Cuz I probably couldn’t cook. Well, at least Jiwoong oppa can’t. So, at least every once in a while. Also, I would want to take care of you too and be with you a lot and so... because you’re so passionate about what you do, I’m sure I wouldn’t say a word that you’re so involved with work but I’d miss you too much.’ Tiffany didn’t interrupt when I held a little pause. ‘So, knowing that, if I were a guy, I probably wouldn’t get involved before it’s too late,’ I finished my explanation.

Tiffany looked somewhat pleased and mildly surprised.

‘Aww~ that’s so sweet of you, Taetae~’ she finally crooned.

“Umm... okay. Was it?”

She cradled my waist towards herself as her head rested on my shoulder and her eyes closed shut.

With a smirk growing on my face, I continued ‘and I’m sure you’d boss me around all the time too so—’

‘Yah! Kim Taeyeon!’ she let go of me and gave me an angry frown and a pout.

‘What?’ I grinned at her teasingly, thoroughly amused by the reaction I was getting. Her eyes squinting as they emitted those little invisible lightning bolts, the crease between her brows deepening and her full lips puckering... ‘I’m just telling the truth here, don’t get so worked up about it!’ She looked so cute. ‘Or are you in love with me now or something?’ I laughed. *“We haven’t kissed in a while now...”* ‘Cuz if you are, I’m warning you—’

‘Pfft. As if,’ she rolled her eyes. ‘Just so you know, I wouldn’t date you either if I were a guy.’

‘Okay,’ I shrugged, knowing that she was just being childish, trying to get back at me. I was really sleepy already so I pulled myself up off the floor and took my towel back to the bathroom to hang it up there to dry.

I thought about the last time we kissed which I barely remembered the next day, along with many other things from that night. I just know we got home, I fought with Fany over something, I don’t know what, and then we somehow ended up kissing again. The next thing I remember is throwing up in the middle of the night and Sunny helping me with everything. I could only hope that that wasn’t going to be the case this night.

I started to brush my teeth since I forgot to do that before.

“I hope it’s gonna be okay tonight,” I pondered. I didn’t mix things like before, I learned from last time... but I kinda felt more drunk now to be quite frank, than that night.

I heard the sound of my phone through the door signaling that I received a message and a moment later, Fany said, ‘Taeyeon, Sooyoung says she found a good Korean restaurant near the shooting location and asked if you wanna get some ddukbokki tomorrow morning with her. Says she’s gonna ask Jiho oppa to get it if you want.’

‘Tell her I do!’ I yelled out with half my mouth stuffed with the toothbrush.

“I’m not very happy with the food here, to be honest. I mean, it’s not bad... it’s different, but not in a bad way... It’s just that, my stomach can’t handle foreign food that well. So I’m always glad if we can find anything authentic to eat on our trips abroad.”

I stepped out of the bathroom for the second time that night and Tiffany went in to put some of her stuff down there. I could see that the rest has already been arranged nicely in the room in the few minutes I was away.

I went to get my contact lens holder and changed the liquid in it, then took out my right lens and just as I closed the lid, I heard Fany call, ‘Taeyeon?’ from behind me.

I turned around, with a little spin in my head and said ‘Yes?’

And then, she kissed me. Out of the blue, she kissed me and I couldn’t say I was *pleasantly* surprised... I was just taken aback.

But for some reason, I didn’t resist her tongue quickly darting its way in to my mouth.

As our tongues twirled together, my mind seemed to twirl into an indescribably confusing state too. As if I had no control of it whatsoever, it just raced into a huge mess of nothingness, making me feel slightly dizzy in a pleasant way.

Out of the twirling mess of tornado thoughts, the ones that my brain seemed to elevate to be able to comprehend were unexpectedly trivial.

“Ouch, my palms hurt like this,” I adjusted my hand on the nightstand as the corner of the top was cutting into my palms that I was supporting myself with while this crazy girl pushed me against it, also supporting herself by her hands placed on top of the small wooden furniture, her arms by my side.

The next one, *“hey, if you keep nibbling on my lips like that, I won’t be able to eat that ddukbokki later, it’ll sting!”* So I bit at her lower lip roughly, signaling that she was going a bit too far.

Instead of the expected reaction of retreating, I felt her smile against my lips. I opened my eyes slightly to confirm my suspicions and saw that I was indeed right and she was smiling.

“What, am I that funny?” I thought, but when she got back to her seemingly very expert tongue work, breathing heavily, I understood that she was smiling in content.

My eyes closing fully again, I wondered if she was just a natural talent or if it took a lot of practice for her to become such a good kisser. I had no idea how good or bad I was.

She bit at my lip again.

‘Yah!’ I now broke apart with a smacking sound leaving our mouths as we separated.

She grinned at me mischievously as she distanced herself from me to an appropriate proximity.

‘Dare say you didn’t like it and I’ll kill you,’ she wagged a finger at me sternly.

‘I won’t. But if my lips are gonna be all chapped because of you—’

‘They won’t,’ she touched my lips, tracing her finger on it, examining. ‘They’re good as new!’

‘Glad to hear that,’ I mumbled. I turned back around towards the nightstand to take my left contact lens out too, since I was kind of distracted after taking out the first one, then threw myself on the bed, closing my eyes and feeling like I could fall asleep right in that moment. I felt the bed bounce with a heavy weight plopping down next to my body.

An ambulance car’s alarm was heard from outside and I wondered what happened to someone right in the moment when I was busy kissing my friend. *“Could a grandma just be having a heart-attack? An office worker struck by electricity? Or maybe—”*

‘Aren’t you even going to ask me why I did it?’ the low voice suddenly distracted my thoughts.

‘Nah, I think I know why you did it.’

‘Really?’ I felt her body shift towards me, from her back, she turned to her side to look at me and I opened my eyes slightly too.

‘Yeah, because I’m too attractive for you to handle,’ I really couldn’t say this with a straight face though. I burst out in laughter at the end and received a hit on the shoulder in exchange. ‘You just couldn’t resist, right?’

‘No, really. Ask me why,’ she poked my side.

‘Okay. Why in the name of the Lord is it that you suddenly just launched yourself at me in the middle of preparing for bed, if I may ask, milady?’

‘I like your pajamas.’

‘Hey, don’t avoid the question now—’

‘No, I mean, I like your pajamas so... I don’t know, instead of saying it so, I just felt like kissing you.’

‘Huh? ... Now, *that’s* pretty weird.’

‘Yeah, I know, right?’ she sighed and turned onto her back again.

‘So, you said you liked Sooyoung’s bracelet just the other day...’ I mused. ‘Did you make out with her too?’

‘Would you be jealous if I said yes?’

‘Yeah, I’d totally kill that jangshin first thing in the morning,’ I yawned, ready for dreamland to finally take over my exhausted body.

‘Mmm...’ was all I could hear her reply and I felt her pulling up the blanket a bit higher next to me.

I heard her cough a few times, making it hard to fall asleep despite my tiredness and drunkenness.

“So that’s what that faint trace of mint taste was! If only she would stop straining her voice all the time, her throat would be much better.”

Her cough pulled me out of my way to sweet dreamland again.

‘Fany, you need to stop trying to substitute a loud-speaker, okay?’

‘Shut up, Tae.’

I fell asleep, wondering how many times it had been we’d done this and if she had any plans to stop any time soon.

05 | Five Caught

I think at one point, all of us thought about quitting. About leaving all of this behind.

And one more time, I was reminded why.

I still had a major issue with our freedom being taken away. It was hard to handle. I couldn't handle it as an immature youngster when I decided I would run away and, even though many years have passed by and now I was supposed to be a mature, grown-up woman, I was still struggling to fully accept it to this day. Of course, now, everything was different. There was no turning back anymore. Not with eight other sisters sharing the same fate as me, not with all the people working for and around us so hard, not with all those fans giving so much love and devotion to us that I didn't even feel like we fully deserved it.

My body rested against the railing and I looked to the distance. Listened to the sound of the streets for a moment. Wishing I would've brought up an iPod or something instead of the alcohol-filled bottle in my hands.

"I friggin hate all of it right now. I only asked for a few hours. Who knows if dad will get better or worse... or maybe even worse than worse, by next Wednesday? By tomorrow morning, even."

The ride to Jeonju and back was six hours. Just the ride in itself. *"Maybe a bit quicker now, in the middle of the night. Let's say five. We have a radio broadcast that I "absolutely cannot miss" in five hours.*

Yeah, mom promised me to keep me updated but what's that worth, really, if something really... bad happens?

I hate all of this right now."

I sighed and took a few sips of the wine I smuggled up with me as I stormed up here, to the rooftop in fury, not wanting the others to see me cry. They knew my dad was not okay but I didn't exactly emphasize how bad it was. It felt like I would just make it all the more serious if I did that.

The wine tasted good but it was almost lukewarm... much like the tears escaping my eyes now.

I just needed to calm down and collect my thoughts a bit. Right now, everything in me was in complete chaos, making my whole being rage and shout and scream in frustration... *"Breathe in, breathe out. Come on, Kim Taeyeon. You can do this! You're a good kid, Taeyeon, you have to have strength. Hwaiting, you can do this!"* I wiped my tears away and sniffled.

Singing and performing is all I ever wanted to do and I would give up my life for it; well, I actually did, quite a long time ago now. But it comes with so many sacrifices... *"I'm sure I couldn't do this alone."* I sighed. *"Not without creating this family around me to substitute my real one, not without eight other people sharing all my pain and joy. I'm sure I couldn't do this alone."*

I felt selfish and irresponsible in every way possible right now, thinking about my real family and thinking about my members.

Some fresh tears wet my face again and my nose was running. I had no tissue with me so I just wiped it on the sleeve of my hoodie and sniffled one more time.

With three to four events a day, little quick interviews shoved in-between and only a very small amount of time and opportunity left for eating and sleeping, with having to change in our vans and looking out sharply for every chance we could catch a toilet, it was a fully packed schedule we had once again. Outside of the variety and radio shows, and the little half-practiced conversations at concerts and interviews, we didn't even have the chance to talk to each other with the members.

Sometimes, I felt like we didn't even have the chance to think about what we were doing, like some sleepwalker trespassing through the dark, without their malfunctioning brain actually knowing what's happening in reality. Or better yet, like the exhausted office worker who put aside all the papers too hard to handle for their tired brain and just let it all pile up, until one day, he'd get too frustrated with all the paperwork and just rip them all to tiny shreds, messy scribbles disrupting the neat typewriting, some parts crumbled, some parts lost, some maybe even singed slightly in an angry fire.

This is where I was right now. But the office worker will still have to deal with the piled up paperwork sometime. And so did I.

Events. Events. Events.

I scratched the paper snaked around the wine bottle.

When we weren't participating in any of those, we were usually practicing, studying scripts, looking up reviews, monitoring ourselves... But I was *so* glad that we were all there for each

other though all of this. They made it seem way easier, way more fun... I can't ever thank them enough for just being there.

I *know*, for a fact, that *none* of us could do this alone.

Finally, at the end of the day though, we all just wanted a little time by ourselves.

"Just five more minutes and I'll go back down, please just give me five more free minutes, please, without cameras, without schedules, without forced smiles and practiced lines, without anybody but the cold night air and me." I was pleading. Probably to God. Then I heard the door to the rooftop open behind me.

I didn't even want to look back to see who it was, but I supposed manager oppa noticed my absence by now.

The steps came nearer, the confident but light sounds of a pair of trainers hitting the ground repeatedly. Hearing that, I was pretty sure this wasn't him after all.

Another two sips of the wine. Looking down at my hands cradling the bottle.

From the corner of my eye, I saw another pair of hands appear beside mine, nails nicely manicured. I really liked those silvery sparkles on it.

And she was probably the next best thing to being left alone right now.

Tiffany was glaring at me but I just kept my eyes firmly on the bottle.

She sighed. *"I know, Fany, I know. Just five more minutes and I'll be okay. Please."* Her left hand peeled my right off of the now almost warm glass surface and gripped it tightly and reassuringly. I looked down at the lights, the streets, the cars below us.

'You know, you shouldn't make it a habit to use alcohol as a solution,' Fany scolded, her gaze still on me. Then she took my bottle and gulped down some of the lukewarm liquid, making me finally look at her.

Her face was slightly red, her hair pulled in a somewhat disheveled ponytail, leaving some soft strands fall out from the grip of the hairband. Her eyes looked tired with all the make-up removed by now, but there was a gleam behind her gaze that made me want to give a pathetic attempt for a smile as she handed back the bottle, smiling at me.

We then took sips of the wine in turns. Fany sighed.

I felt the cold breeze that was coming now, giving me goose bumps, my skin slightly sweaty from the practice from earlier.

My brain was on overdrive but I needed to calm down, and soon. Fany's presence helped a lot, but in such a situation, even being together did not make all troubles seem to disappear.

'I'm not good at giving those speeches,' she let out a helpless and almost completely soundless laugh. Instead, she stroked my hand with her thumb running across my skin as another sign of reassurance.

"It's okay," I thought. *"You just being here is good enough for now."*

Then I wondered how she knew I was here. I turned my head towards her, ready to voice out my question, but just as I felt my eyebrows furrow together and my lips form an O, she said 'We always used to come here, back when we were trainees and needed a good cry.'

Yeah, everyone did. There were times when I came up here just so I could be alone in my moment of weakness but instead found two other girls crying on the rooftop with another trying to console them. Boys were just the same.

And so, I preferred the Han river. I watched how the mass of water swallowed my dropping tears and sometimes even wondered if it would swallow my body so seamlessly, too.

"One, two, three, four." I swallowed, and handed the bottle to Tiffany again. She drank some more and the bottle was finished. It wasn't full already when I brought it up, it was a leftover from the drinks we had earlier, but I was still surprised at how quickly you could consume such a thing when you really felt desperate.

It was my turn to sigh deeply.

Several long moments dragged by in a seemingly sluggish pace but I still didn't feel ready to go back.

'Come to me,' her voice gently seeped its way through the silence of the night as she started singing. *'I'll take care of you... protect you... calm, calm down...'* I found some kind of a softness in her singing that I usually wouldn't. Most of the time, she was too focused on the notes, the way she would shape her mouth or the intensity with which she wanted to bring out the voice from her throat. *'You're exhausted,'* I think I only heard her sing like this before... when she was singing to her mother. It gave me a really warm, really soothing feeling. *'Come, lie down.'* I laid my head on her shoulder and closed my eyes, forgetting for a moment about

everything else in this world except the soulful, heart-trembling voice that softly penetrated my ears. *'You don't have to explain. I understand.'*

My breathing calm and labored, I let myself sink into her... I let my soul sink into hers for a moment, just getting rid of my burdens and doubts and pain for a second there, on the rooftop, with me, and her, and her singing.

As she took a breath, I unconsciously inhaled as well, and hearing our synchronized intake of air, I thought, *"We are more than lovers ever could be. We are more than that because we are just not that. We are unexplainable by simple words. No dictionary or encyclopedia would ever have a definition for this. And it's just how it should be."*

As this painstakingly beautiful realization hit me... no, to be honest, it felt more like it *flowed* through me... a lone tear made its way down my cheek, until it stopped its road on the edge of the bridge, my chin, waiting to be either caught or fall freely into the deep.

I felt a single cold fingertip on my jaw. Tiffany always had bad circulation. But her cold touch felt strangely hot against my warm skin as she slid her finger along my jawline just to eventually wipe the droplet of tear away from my chin as it hung on its last lifeline, ready to take the jump.

I never even noticed when she stopped singing.

I looked up at her then. She was such a beautiful person. In that moment, more than any time before.

The wind blew our hair wildly, and a lot of it landed in our faces. I freed my hand of hers to sweep away mine and Fany did the same. My eyes followed her fingers.

But a strand of hair kept insisting to take its unrighteous place on Tiffany's face, softly hitting her cheek every now and then, so I raised my hand to tuck it behind Tiffany's ear.

Slowly, her lips spread into a warm smile, her eyes sparkled and the city lights painted her face rather soft and innocent-looking. The pinkish tint on her face that was caused by the heat of the dance practice has disappeared by now and was replaced by a faint rosy hue coloring her cute button nose. The wine.

Like the waves of a sinus curve, her beaming smile disappeared in a pace just as slow as it brightened up her features a moment ago as I lowered one hand beside my body, the other propped against the cold surface of the flat metal railing.

We've been silent for a long time now but neither of us complained.

The thought of cracking a joke to make the atmosphere less serious, to make her unable to stare into my soul, did not even come close to turn up in my mind. It just didn't feel necessary.

Fany slowly leaned in.

I wished I was taller.

I could feel her breath mingling with mine for a fraction of a second before my lips got gently trapped between hers.

She sucked on my upper then lower lip firmly, but not too firmly, before making way into my mouth by pushing her tongue between my parted lips. I inhaled shakily and—

‘What the—’

‘Oh. My. God. This can't be real.’

‘Oh my...’

Three voices intruded the perfect concert consisting of silence and the ringing sound of our lips' movements against each other. It was abruptly ended by a messy and disorganized clatter of all the instruments in the hall - our mouth being torn off the other's.

“Oh, great, now I know what my night was missing. A little more drama. Just wonderful.”

‘Ah, sh*t...’ It was a rare occasion to hear Tiffany Hwang swear but when she did, it was usually in English. She used to swear more when she came here, always in English. She changed a lot over the times... Then again, I did too.

Strangely enough, I felt more composed than any time before, a nice contrast to my behavior from earlier, when I saw three shocked faces in the doorway leading up to the rooftop. Jessica, Sooyoung and Yuri stood frozen.

I did, too, as soon as I turned around, and I felt Tiffany stiffen up by me as well.

It never really hit me before that if they ever found out about us doing this, whatever it was, they might misunderstand. Their expression right now, though, was enough to make me realize that they thought they had just discovered a big secret we've been hiding from them, like a relationship, let's say.

That wasn't the case though.

'Umm...' I started after what seemed like several long minutes even though they were probably a mere awkward seconds. 'I know this sounds stupid and all but... it's really not what you think.'

'Well, it sure looks like we just caught you two kissing on the rooftop,' Jessica folded her arms and threw her head tilted to the left, as if she was some mother scolding a child.

'Yeah, well, then it's kind of what you think,' I grinned a bit awkwardly, rubbing the back of my neck and looking at the asphalt floor, or rather roof, for a lack of better things to look at, just so that I wouldn't have to meet their questioning gazes. 'But it's—'

'Since when has this gone on between you two?' Sooyoung's eyes were still wide as I looked back at her.

'Umm... I don't know...' I honestly replied. 'A few months?' I turned to look at Fany for help.

'Yeah... uhh...' she seemed a bit disoriented. 'Four months ago... was the first time...'

'Oh, wow,' Sooyoung replied.

I heard Yuri murmur to herself. It seemed like she had something to say but was trying to gather her thoughts, her words together before doing so. Jessica started tapping her feet meanwhile.

'But it's not like we're to—'

'Unnies, Hyoyeon unnie said we should—' Seohyun appeared in the doorway and she didn't notice the blatantly tense situation right in front of her until Sooyoung raised a hand to stop her talking.

'We've got something serious to discuss here,' she said.

'No, it's—' Fany interrupted, but maknae was too worried to wait for the situation to explain itself.

'What is it?' she asked on a low and scared tone.

"Now, they're really making an unnecessarily big deal out of this," I thought, even though in a

similar situation, I probably would've reacted the same way too.

'These two just sneaked up here so that they could be kissing instead of—'

Maknae's eyes widened and were now as huge as saucers. "*I wish I had such big eyes. Like manhwa characters. Or those western people with those exotic, big sparkly blue eyes.*" Her jaw dropped as if on command, too.

'What???'

'Okay, guys, will you just let me explain?' Tiffany finally said.

'Unnie, did you and Taeyeon unnie really... you know...?'

'Kiss just now? Yes. But you're all taking this the wrong way. I mean, we're not together or anything,' she explained. 'It's not like that.'

I was relieved that they finally let her speak and we got that out of the way at least.

'Okay,' Jessica replied.

'So... ' I continued. 'It's nothing serious, really, and it's not like we do this *all the time* either, right, Fany?'

She nodded her head and the others were focusing on our words intently.

'Then... *when* do you do it?' Yuri suddenly spoke. 'I mean, when did you do it? How many times did it happen?'

'Just a few and... when... when I... umm... I guess... when we feel like it... ahh, this is just...' Tiffany sighed in exasperation. 'Okay. Guys. Really. You're making this much more awkward than it should be.'

I just kept turning my head from here to there and saw that the members' initially shocked expressions have now turned much more... confused and... they had this look that made me feel kind of weird, too.

'Really? I think you're making this awkward for yourselves,' Jessica replied, shrugging.

Seohyun appeared to be deep in thought. Conflicted.

“What else could be said? What did they want us to say? Why can’t we just go back down and continue things where we left off instead of just standing here uselessly?”

In the slightly windy and cold autumn night, with my training clothes still a bit wet, I started to feel the need to go to the bathroom too.

‘What else do you want us to say?’ I inquired, not knowing what else to do.

After a short pause, ‘are you, unnies, in love with each other?’

Straight to the point. Should have known maknae would not hesitate to ask.

‘No,’ I replied. It was as simple as that. I mean, it’s not like it hasn’t crossed my mind that there could be more to this, but there wasn’t. Tiffany and I, we were... just... a special case. *Right?*

‘You’re both girls though...’ Yuri said half-loudly but the space was filled with so much silence, it was more than easy to hear every word.

It was only then that it really dawned on me. The weirdest thing about this is not that we’re just casually making out from time to time as friends... We’re both girls. That’s something I didn’t really give much thought to before.

‘Yeah,’ I heard Tiffany say. ‘That’s why it’s not—’

‘You guys, I know, it’s weird... but it’s... you don’t need to overthink it,’ I finally burst out, repeating the same line I heard from Tiffany about four months ago when I probably had the same shocked, then confused and weird look on my face as them. ‘It’s just kissing. Right, Fany?’ I turned to her again, asking for confirmation so that the others would see that we were on the same page.

‘Yeah,’ she repeated.

‘Well,’ Sooyoung spoke, ‘it’s kind of hard not to over-think it when you say you’ve been doing this several times before and we see the way you usually act with each other—’ I knew someone would bring that up, I *knew* it. And I rolled my eyes on instinct.

‘Okay, that’s enough.’ I was surprised at Jessica’s sudden intervention. ‘If they say that’s all there is to it, then it’s their business. We’ll talk about it later, we need to go back.’

‘Well,’ Sooyoung looked as though she was ready to protest but Sica’s glare seemed to stop her. ‘... as long as you’re *really* not in a relationship... I guess so...’ she finally said but I knew she

was curious and was itching to know more.

‘But if you *do* get into a relationship, we have a pact, remember?’ Seohyun said. ‘Please keep to that, unnies, okay? It doesn’t matter if it’ll be a guy or... or anyone else, we still promised, right?’

Yes, we made a promise a long time ago that no matter what, we would tell each other if we dated anyone. There were several reasons to do that and, although thus far there weren’t really *many* occasions, whenever we *did* date someone, all of us kept this promise.

I just nodded and Fany did the same.

‘Sure,’ I said. ‘But if our schedules continue to be like this, I doubt you will see me get into a relationship before I reach the ripe age of fifty,’ I joked, sighing, and it finally worked. The mood seemed to be less serious now and much, much less tense.

‘Okay, I guess... we’ll leave you guys here for a minute to sort things out a bit and... just come back soon, okay? No more making out for tonight!’ Sooyoung grinned and turned around, shaking her head. The others left with her and I heard them starting to talk as soon as the door was closed.

‘Well... that was really awkward,’ I finally turned to Tiffany. ‘Like really, *really* awkward. Way more awkward than I thought it would be.’

‘Yeah, I know,’ Fany shook her head.

I picked up the wine bottle and we started making our way towards the door too.

‘Hey,’ I nudged her arm. ‘Why so cheesy though?’ I grinned and she looked up at me.

‘Huh?’

‘The way we, you know... it... it was almost like a scene from a sappy drama,’ I chuckled. I couldn’t help but wonder what it would’ve been like, had we not been interrupted. ‘Good thing we weren’t at Namsan tower, it was alm—’

‘Yah!’ Tiffany crossed her arms and looked at me indignantly. ‘There was nothing sappy about it, my timing was perfect for your information!’

‘Really? How do you know?’

‘I just know,’ she huffed.

‘No, you don’t.’

‘Yes, I do.’ From the corner of my eye, I saw a grin on her lips.

‘No, you d—’

‘Would you have kissed me back if the timing was wrong?’ Oh. *“Actually, if she didn’t tell me just now, I totally wouldn’t have remembered that I did kiss back. But now that she’s saying, yeah... Wow, I think I’m doing this too automatically now if I didn’t even notice I did it, aren’t I.”*

‘Okay, you win,’ I said and felt a smirk grow on my lips as I remembered responding. If we could’ve just continued...

She gave me a wink and a playful smile played along her lips, then she burst into a full, gleaming smile, and took hold of my hand as we descended the stairs that led to the elevator.

While my brain traveled back to the pile of crumpled and burnt nasty scribbles, another thought suddenly nagged on me: *“We might have to let go of each other’s hands once we get back to the practice room now.”*

After The Break-up

‘And it’s just that... I don’t know if I made the right decision... maybe...’ she sniffed, ‘maybe I should’ve given us more time.’

It’s been three days since she broke up with her boyfriend after almost two months of being together. Even though time ran by really fast with our busy lives, a lot of things could happen in two months and it seemed that Tiffany was greatly affected by this short-lived relationship.

The girls had a strange reaction when the two got together and seemed to look at me in concern which I soon figured out to be because of what happened between us before. After that incident on the rooftop, we explained to them one more time how it all was just out of affection, a spur of the moment thing that’d sometimes happen when we’re drunk; a thing that was *not* supposed to be taken so seriously. But apparently, they were still surprised by the fact that everything just went on as normal even when the two went official. Luckily, they got over their delusions quickly and stopped looking at me and Tiffany like we were some aliens from another planet. Life went on.

It was a major shock to me, actually, when Tiffany announced their break-up in the group chat a few days ago.

I could tell that she had a hard time in the last couple of days, but she never cried, not even when with some of the girls, we managed to talk to her about it for a bit. With our packed schedules and restless sleep one could’ve just assumed she was tired from the long working hours but to me, it was obvious that it was way beyond that.

Once we came back from dinner tonight though and entered the room, she immediately collapsed as if she was a ragdoll that their puppeteer suddenly dropped.

And now, I could only sit next to her on the floor and rub her back with my palm, trying to soothe her a bit. I didn’t really know what to say but I knew I hated seeing her like this.

She cried a little more. She hasn’t had the chance, or maybe she was just unable to cry it all out in the past few days. Perhaps, it only really sank in by now. Perhaps, the alcohol eased it out of her.

I sighed, feeling pain gather up in my chest at the sight of my desperately crying friend, knowing there was nothing I could do to help her.

I wanted to change into something more comfortable but I felt obligated not to leave her alone for even a second in this state.

To be honest, I didn't know either if she made the right choice or not. They seemed to match well together. There were moments when I felt a bit odd about him, that's true, but Fany's boyfriends have always... ahh, nevermind. Point is, it looked like things were going well for them. But she said it was not what she expected and that something just did not feel right with him. I already told her that if she wasn't sure about her feelings after almost two months, it probably *is* better that she let him go but she kept insisting that maybe, she should've tried harder to make it work.

I really don't know.

I *have* had a similar experience before but, although the memories of our parting were still bitter, I never doubted for a moment that it was for the better. That we stopped when we did, I mean. I knew I wasn't the right person for him... he was too good to me without me deserving it because I just couldn't reciprocate. I honestly don't know if Fany feels the same, all she keeps telling us is that something was off, that it wasn't right for her to keep doing this when she could feel that he wasn't the right one.

She *says* that, but I think that doesn't make her feel any less guilty.

We already told her how we think it's better that she listened to her heart and that she shouldn't blame herself that things just didn't work out the way she thought they would. Even her sister said the same. It's not like she wanted to *not* fall for him enough, it's not like she had *control* over something like that.

I felt like everything that needed to be said had been said before and that just made me all the more helpless now.

So I just kept rubbing her back in circles as if my hand had some kind of a supernatural power that'd heal her bleeding wounds.

She blew her nose loudly. She always did everything loudly. I let my lips curve into a faint smile at the thought.

She slowly ran out of tears. Her body was crouched.

'I'm so tired...' It was not a full sentence, the way she left it hanging. And I knew what she was thinking. I was tired, too. Exhausted. We all were.

‘Me too,’ I replied honestly. She was one of the only handful of people on this planet that I could truly open up to, and throughout the years, I got the feeling that it was much the same for her.

Surely, we did mention being tired a lot of times in interviews.

But what Tiffany and I were now talking about without really saying it, was not the kind of tired most interviewers, most fans, friends or family asked us about.

It had nothing to do with physical exhaustion.

We were constantly giving and giving and giving all we possibly could give and even though we had sources to recollect from, we were barely capable of doing so.

Like sponges being constantly squeezed out to be left delightfully light but uselessly dry, then plunged into the water for the refreshing wetness but a weight too heavy to be borne... no matter whether we were giving or getting, losing or collecting, emitting or absorbing...

It was tiring.

We were emotionally and mentally exhausted to the point where it was testing our limits every day.

And this, this is not something I easily let people see, even if they were close to me, even if I knew they’d understand.

Tiffany was different. Involuntarily, over the times, I had revealed this side of mine to her as we became closer than I ever did with my own, blood-related sister, and by now, there was no point in hiding it.

She had always been better at covering these things up though because she could even convince *herself* to a certain degree that she was alright. This made her all the harder to figure out. It’s not like she had *much* to hide either, but whatever she *did* conceal had surely had a weight. Time and time again, she proved that she had heavy burdens deep under the covers, like tiny droplets of lead beneath her skin...

Moments like this were rare so to witness them left all the stronger impact on me than with anyone else. Moments like these shook me up inside like nothing else...

Not to mention I was also drunk. “*Not helping much with keeping my emotions at bay right*

now... ”

It felt like none of us needed to say anything like “we’ll be fine” or “it will be okay.” We didn’t need those words and I doubt that either of us could’ve even said them convincingly enough at such a time. We just needed this silence for a bit, this nothing-to-do for a bit.

So we just sat like that for a few minutes. My gaze was lowered on her lap but I could see from the corner of my eyes that she wiped her eyes every now and then.

I could've made a joke about how my jeans were cutting off my circulation and my leg might just fall off if I sat like that for much longer, but it really didn't feel like the time just yet.

I kept tracing circles on her back absent-mindedly with my palm and she heaved in a big sigh.

I heard some noises from the kitchen.

It looked like Tiffany calmed down a bit. So I withdrew my hand from her back.

I noticed the little pile of used tissues that built up beside Fany... Her purse dropped carelessly to the edge of the bed...

Pinching between my fingertips, I picked some fluff off my jeans to throw it on the floor.

Then she sighed again.

She started sobbing and my hand immediately went back to trace those circles on her back.

“Maybe they did have some kind of a supernatural power,” I thought. “It’d be so good if they did right now...”

‘It’s better that I finished it off now, right?’ she choked. This wasn’t as much of a question as a need for confirmation.

‘It is, Tiffany, don’t worry... it’ll be fine.’ I finally said it anyway. And I wasn’t sure if I was lying or not.

She was staring at her knees for a while with a blank expression and empty eyes.

Then she looked up at me.

Her face wet from the tears, her nose red, eyes still brimmed with pure, translucent liquid... I

couldn't take my eyes off her. She looked up at me and my heart wanted to break. Her stare seemed almost pleading.

My hand slowly fell to the floor beside me.

I swallowed the salty tears from her lips as my warm mouth welcomed hers like an old friend.

It's been a while.

A long while, I realized.

And I had to admit, I missed this. I missed this kind of closeness with her. Her warm lips on me, her nose brushing against mine... I missed this.

At the same time, I couldn't help but wonder if she was thinking about him when she was kissing me now... Did it even matter? There were so many things I still didn't know.

She seemed a bit weaker now than how I remembered. Softer, I'd say. But I think, given the current situation, it made sense. Still, she must've possessed some kind of a beastly instinct because fighting over the dominance of our tongues never seemed harder despite her fragile state.

She needed it, at least, I felt like she really needed it while she kissed me hungrily. She was parched and I just offered her a sip of water. She took in every droplet with all she had.

I felt fresh tears on her trembling lips and I let my tongue quickly sweep them away.

It seemed like we'd been kissing for the longest time yet, but I didn't want to let go. "*For her sake,*" I told myself. "*For her sake.*"

But really, I missed this too much without even knowing.

Finally, she pulled away slowly.

Her head came to rest on my lap and I automatically started smoothing my fingers over her silky hair. She looked like a child, with her legs and arms pulled close to her body in a foetal position. 'I love you.' I knew how much she was missing her mom in that moment. 'Really, I...' she sighed and her face screwed up in pain as tears began to flow out of her eyes again. She never got to finish what she was about to say but really, it didn't matter.

'It's okay Fany,' I said as I felt my own tears choking me, 'It's okay.'

07 | Seven

A Late Night Movie

My head rested on Fany's shoulder and I could smell her hair very well from here. It was really nice. Somehow, the fragrance appeared to bring a tingling feeling alive in my senses. It must have been the combination of her shampoo and perfume but I felt a mixture of a fresh, fruity smell and something a bit like cinnamon... or maybe... some other spice that made your brain go fuzzy, I don't know, but I liked it.

I inhaled her scent, then chuckled at myself because I “inhaled” pretty loudly. In other words, I basically sniffed her hair. Then I turned my attention back on the dialogue between the main characters and, by this point, I was sure they had both fallen for each other. It's just that that stupid guy was too dense to realize this. *“Pfft. Guys. Not like I can talk from much experience but—”*

‘How is it?’ Tiffany asked.

I shook my head. ‘Why is it that guys are so dense, honestly, isn't it obvious that—?’

‘No, I mean,’ I brought up my head from her shoulder curiously, ‘how's my hair? Smells good?’

‘Oh.’ I was a bit taken aback. ‘Yeah, it smells nice. Fruity and spicy. If there was a food that smelled like this, I'd eat it,’ I replied and momentarily wondered if I would've told her this if I weren't under the influence of alcohol. It sounded kinda weird...

‘Glad to hear that,’ she said with that frowning smile of hers, you know, the one that she always does when I say or do something stupid. And she's amused by my stupidity. Or maybe, to make it sound nicer, let's just say she enjoys when I act dorky.

I turned my attention back on the screen.

‘Why are you smelling my hair though, Kim Taeyeon?’ she asked all of a sudden. The scene in the movie switched to the girl fighting with her parents about her arranged marriage. I looked at her again, searching for an answer. Instead, all that came to mind as my eyes met her piercing gaze was that I really wanted to kiss her.

‘Does there...’ my eyes involuntarily traveled to her lips for a moment, ‘have to be a reason?’ I met her gaze again.

I only registered licking my lips after I'd instinctively done so.

She knew what I wanted.

'No,' her face was dangerously close to mine and her breath made my lips tingle, 'I guess not.' I didn't retract a bit, though.

And she closed the gap between us.

I turned my upper body completely to the side, towards her, and while my left arm rested on the back of the couch now, my right pressed down on my knee as I claimed her lips greedily, pushing against her harder, body leaning forward in the process.

Look, this is my life, I'm an adult and you have no right to make decisions for me. I heard the girl shout. *I have my job, my car, my apartment.* Our lips smacking softly... *Do you want me to move to another country to see that I'm not your baby anymore?*

I slowed down the pace of our kiss for a moment by slowly sliding my parted lips closer to each other and sucking in her lower lip between them. *...and you have always had our full support but now...* Our lips accidentally separated for a moment but Tiffany quickly changed that by coming at me again, head tilted to the side, and I would lie if I'd say I didn't like this new position and the access it allowed to the both of us. *...but you never even try to listen to me...* It was as if we didn't even have our own mouths anymore, I was literally confused about which tongue was whose and which breath belonged to who. Heat rose rapidly in my body and I tightened my grip on the backrest of the couch while my other hand formed a fist. *... it's like you only gave birth to me to have a puppy you can train...*

'Are westerners really this disrespectful towards their parents?' I suddenly broke away, breathing heavily. The thought had been bothering me too much to be able to concentrate.

As I looked at Tiffany, I could see that she was clearly disappointed. She exhaled loudly and gave me a discontent look from the corner of her eye as she pulled a cushion to herself and threw one leg under the other.

'Sorry,' I apologized. 'It just really bothered me.'

She sighed. 'Yeah, I guess... compared to Koreans... yeah, most western kids will not show as much respect towards their parents. But honestly,' she raised an eyebrow at me. 'Are you siding with the parents here? 'Cuz she's totally right, she can do whatever she wants.'

'Yeah, but I mean, if *my* parents told me I couldn't date someone, this would not be the way I'd

react to it, for sure,' I shrugged.

'Really? I totally would,' she turned back to the screen and I did too.

'Hmm.' I wouldn't have expected it any other way. "*Stubborn, bossy, passionate... Yeah, that's totally her.*" I smirked to myself, looking at the protagonist of the movie.

'If you really love someone,' she continued in a calm tone after a few seconds of silence, 'shouldn't you try to protect them... protect your relationship in front of your parents?' she looked at me pointedly, brows furrowed. 'Would you just sit on your butt and say, "oh, yeah mom, yeah dad, you're right, this guy is *horrible*, we shouldn't be together" *even* though you love him? Could you just do that to the one you really love?'

'Hmm...' I thought about that for a moment and it did make some sense. If I truly loved someone, it had to be for a good reason. So not only would it be really hard to separate just because of my parents' opinions, it would also feel like a betrayal if I didn't even *try* to fight for someone I love so much... My parents have always been very supportive of me though, so honestly, it was a hard concept to wrap my brain around. Especially in the middle of the night, with those cocktails still making my head spin a little.

We continued watching the movie in silence.

08 | Eight

Private Afterparty

I saw Tiffany eyeing me from a distance and she looked somewhat... annoyed. She should have paid attention to what Sungmin oppa and Geonyong oppa were trying to explain to her but then again, I should have too. I totally lost the line though when I realized Tiffany was watching me, wondering what was up with her, glancing her direction every once in a while to see if she was still staring.

Right now, she was smiling brightly at the two guys in front of her but as soon as my eyes settled back on the oppas I was supposed to be talking to, I felt her gaze on me again.

“Okay, something really must be bothering her,” I now thought. *“But what?”*

I looked at her again, and this time, she didn’t even try to hide it. Neither did I. It was way too obvious by now that we’ve been stealing glances at each other, or rather, her glaring at me and me trying to figure out why, for like... the past five minutes.

She was looking straight into my eyes and I mouthed her a silent “what?” She looked towards the corner of the room, urging. I glanced at the spot she was looking at and saw Hyoyeon and Sunny talking to this lady that didn’t even seem a bit familiar to me. *“What about her? Should I go greet her or what? Is she an important person?”*

‘... Taeyeon-ssi must’ve experienced that much more than we did, right?’ My attention was diverted when Jaehoon oppa mentioned my name.

“Uh-oh, I have no idea what you’re talking about.” ‘Maybe,’ I replied with a small smile, averting my gaze a bit... it felt like the right gesture in that moment and it seemed to work.

‘Gosh, this girl is too modest,’ oppa said admiringly and continued talking about whatever he was talking before, but I immediately went back to looking at Tiffany.

I gave her a questioning look as she noticed I had my eyes on her again and turned hers on me, frustrated. She looked down at her own hand and then back at the oppas, saying something to them. I was distracted by her sudden smile only for a moment before realizing she was discreetly signaling with her hand to me.

She pointed towards the door around the corner where, just a minute ago, I saw that lady and signaled walking with her index and middle fingers. Pointing at the door, walking, pointing at the door, walking.

“Oh, now I got it! She wants us to go out!”

Good. I was never really keen on these events, anyway... Wow, are these drinks making me slow or what.”

But by the time my conclusion was made, I saw Tiffany walking towards us.

She bowed slightly and said hello.

‘I’m really sorry but could I steal Taeyeon-ssi here for just a minute?’ she asked, smiling, while cradling my left arm towards herself.

‘Of course, no problem, we’ll see each other later Taeyeon-ssi.’

Tiffany put down both her glass, then mine on the nearest table, stretching her left arm instead of letting mine go.

‘Yes, it was nice talking to you,’ I smiled, bowing a little and Tiffany bowed with me then started striding out towards the door impatiently.

‘What’s up with you? You usually like these social events and whatnot.’ She was basically pulling me with herself now. We passed by some security guards but she kept going until... we finally reached a toilet. ‘Oh.’ “*She just needed to go. Okay. Why didn’t she just say so?*”

But once she opened the door, she didn’t let hand go of my hand. The door shut closed behind us. And she rushed into a toilet booth – pulling me with her. Now I really didn’t understand. Until—

Another “oh,” was all I could manage as she let go of my hand and urged me against the wall without a single word or touch. Her body nearing mine as rapidly as humanly possible was enough.

A pair of palms hit the wall next to my head as I felt her mouth angrily claiming mine. Being pushed against the wall like that, with her forceful kiss leaving no room for argument, I felt like I was a possession of hers. And I could only oblige.

My hands rested, or should I say *struggled*, against the wall behind me too, but mine were by my thighs. And suddenly, I felt a very strong urge to touch her, to pull her closer, to feel the warmth of her body, that I could now feel radiating on me, fully pressed against mine. But my hands were cold and I knew I’d be going over the limits with that. My back was cold too.

Despite the fact that I felt like my blood was boiling.

“I mean, I know we’ve done this many times before, but what is it this time?” During these little make-out sessions, she never really was the type to be soft and gentle, but this was something else... somehow, she seemed more forceful yet more afraid too? I could feel her trembling... with anger? Frustration...?

Or was it something else?

Was I reading too much into this? Or do I just know her too well by now?

As if she read my mind, she started to speak in-between our lips meeting.

‘You seemed...’ her tongue massaged mine for a moment, ‘really bored...’ she spoke against my lips, ‘out there...’ she caught my lips between her teeth, pulling, ‘with those oppas...’ I felt it again. That force, that feeling of becoming her possession. *“This is new. I don’t know if I like it or not... Well, if I’ll let my body decide, then I definitely do.”* Everything just felt so... intense right now.

She continued. ‘I thought... I’d give you... something... more... exciting to do,’ I felt her smile against my lips again.

I started running out of breath while she kissed me lengthily as if saying, “oxygen is unnecessary when kissing Tiffany Hwang.” I believed her. And so, I didn’t even try to pull away or break apart as she connected our mouths, our tongues fighting, in what seemed like an endless battle. Well, it would’ve been hard to do so anyway, considering my whole body was up against the wall. I was about to win the round when I sensed movement from Tiffany, and just when I felt her fingers touch my hips—

Click. Clack. Click. Clack.

A pair of heels were heard as someone entered the bathroom. No two people have jumped apart faster than we did in that moment. And I was sure I saw Tiffany’s hands come from the level of my hips which proved that she was actually about to hold my hips... she was about to *break the rules*...

“What now?” I mouthed to her exasperatedly, not knowing what to do. They definitely couldn’t see us being in or coming out of the same booth, whoever it was. Our breaths were heavy and my heart raced at the thought that the person now using the booth right next to us could’ve heard us.

“Nothing, we’ll wait,” she mouthed, shrugging. Luckily, it wasn’t one of those booths that let your feet be seen but we still couldn’t move much because in the silent, echoing bathroom, any sound could easily give us away.

But then another person entered the bathroom.

We couldn’t stay *that* long...

I nudged Tiffany’s shoulder, mouthing the same thing.

She gave a silent sigh. Then she quietly pulled her phone out. »u go ahead now, ill go bck after these 2 left«

Brilliant.

I was just about to open the door when I head Tiffany flush the toilet, startling me. Then she zipped her purse up a bit. “*Oh, I get what you’re doing,*” I grinned at her and she smiled back proudly, giving a slight raise of the brows, and I finally left the booth. I washed my hands and checked myself in the mirror when the lady that came in first stepped out of her booth.

I didn’t know her but I realized I felt like I didn’t like her for some reason. At the same time, a bit of embarrassment tinted my cheeks now even though the lady did not seem to have the faintest idea of what she had just interrupted. She was around my mother’s age.

I fixed my now messed up hair and put on some lip gloss quickly as the lady started washing her hands, and I left the bathroom trying to look as calm and normal as possible. But I still felt my heart race when I thought of Tiffany. “*What if she gets out at the wrong time? Will one of the ladies question why she came out of a booth that another girl just did? The lady I saw seemed too old to recognize me but what if the other one was a younger girl? If she asks Tiffany, ‘what did you do in the same booth with Kim Taeyeon...?’*”

Okay. I think I’m going too far. Did I get drunk again?

Oh yeah. That’s probably why I feel giddy and just a tad dizzy too now.

Where the heck is that hall we were in?

Oh, got it.”

Once I found our hall, I grabbed another glass of champagne and started gulping it down as I made my way towards a little group where I saw Yuri.

I finally had a moment to think to myself after I politely said hello and joined the group.

“She wasn’t supposed to do what she did... Should I talk to her about it? We’ve never really discussed what was fine to do and what wasn’t. I... just assumed we were on the same page about this.

Is it even okay that it’s becoming kind of a habit again? Or is it time to put an end to this?”

Finally, about a minute after I arrived, which seemed a lot more like ten to me, I saw Tiffany coming in and she immediately spotted our group and started making her way towards us... but she was stopped by Yunho oppa and Changmin oppa starting a conversation with her, laughing. She smiled back at them and for the rest of the night I saw no sign of the events that happened between us earlier whatsoever.

“Well, maybe we’ll talk some other time.”

09 | Nine

Back To Where It All Began

She threw herself next to me on the bed and I turned towards her onto my side, still laughing lightly, as did she.

‘Hey,’ I poked her waist.

She turned her head to look at me with a smile, her eyebrows raised.

I smiled back and tapped at my lips twice with my index finger.

Don’t ask me why. I know I shouldn’t have. But I’ve been thinking about it all night. *“Should I blame it on the drinks that I— Oh, who am I trying to fool here, I didn’t even drink that much tonight.”*

I expected her usual response. A mischievous smile and a wild animal pouncing at my lips as if they were the prey.

This is not what happened.

Not this time.

Her eyes turned serious and so did her whole expression.

It looked as if she was trying to read me as she bit her lip, scanning my face with her eyes, eyelashes batting. What expression I wore at the time, I couldn’t tell.

Next thing I knew, she slowly sat up in the bed then climbed off from the side, and she made her way towards her door. I turned onto my back, propping myself up by the elbows.

I didn’t know what happened or what she was doing. But I was captured by her figure and the atmosphere, too much to be able to utter a word. Too much to want to disturb the silence of the room.

I heard a click and saw her hand on the doorknob, her head tilted downwards. She closed the door. I didn’t know what to think. *“What is she planning to do to me?”*

Another click and the lights were off.

My heart beat noticeably louder inside my chest.

She climbed on the bed.

She climbed on top of me.

Her knees beside my waist, she turned the bedside lamp on. Her movements were so slow, the room was so quiet, for a moment I wondered if I'd been dropped into a silent movie, the tape being dragged way too slowly and the movements of the actors becoming lousy...

I gulped when she turned to look at me.

I felt somewhat scared but at the same time, somewhat expectant.

Her body crouched over mine as she leaned closer.

“What are you doing to me? What are you trying to do to me?” I didn't know who I was asking because all Tiffany did was look at me. Simply look at me.

As simple as the action was, the more meaning it seemed to carry than all the kisses we had ever shared before. The more feelings it brought out of me than anything ever before.

She tucked her hair behind her ears. First, the right side, with her right hand, then the left side, using the same hand again. With her gaze kept fixed on me. I was captured by her eyes like there was a never ending story behind the depths of her pupils and I just couldn't afford to miss a letter.

My stomach was tickled by something. Could it be—? *No way.*

She never broke eye-contact. Not even when she leaned in completely, hovering over my lips for a few moments.

She finally pressed her hot lips against mine.

She didn't keep them there for long though.

She slowly pulled away.

But not far enough.

I yearned for more. Her breath was covering my lips like a warm blanket.

She kissed me again. I breathed her scent in.

This time, her lips stayed longer... but still not long enough.

She pulled further away this time around though.

I exhaled.

She looked unsure as she searched my eyes for something.

Insecure, is what she was.

“Tiffany? Insecure? About this? She threw herself at me like a wild animal just the other day... and now she was insecure...?” I was baffled.

But Tiffany Hwang always had confidence somewhere, hidden at the inside pocket of a pink little coat, maybe under the little rip that allows small coins to slide in and disappear without notice, just to turn up once unexpectedly... She must’ve found her little lost coin somewhere again as she leaned back down, to kiss me one more time.

Her tongue asked for entrance this time, hesitantly. I never remember that happening before. She always burst through the doors without any warning or concern. I gladly gave her access and she gently pushed her tongue against mine.

Then something happened.

She shifted a bit...

and then...

She touched my cheek. And I felt my face heat up.

Then my whole body, reacting similarly to the simple contact of warm skin, *her* warm skin brushing against my own.

Something... some curious sensation was traveling through my spine. And I have found that it felt good. *So* good...

I never reacted to her like this though. I didn’t understand. We’ve done this so many times before, and by now, I knew I enjoyed it of course, but... it couldn’t be anything more, right? *“I*

mean, if it were, why didn't I react this way before? What's happening, seriously?"

'Tiffany,' I called weakly, muffled against her hot lips... Weakly. *"Wait, why did my voice sound so desperate?"*

She didn't seem to bother stopping though; I think she didn't get that that's what I meant to achieve by calling her name. The way it ended up coming out of my mouth, *I* wouldn't have either.

'Fany-ah,' I tried again, with a bit more force in my voice, trying to separate, but she just seemed to become more fuelled by that and I had nowhere to escape. And it's not that I wanted to do that, I just... didn't know what I could— or how I should—

My hands, that previously held onto the corners of my pillow, slowly and unsurely made their way to her legs.

From the back of her knees that she was supporting herself on, my palms crept higher and higher and I felt her sigh into my mouth. I could've gone higher and I know she would've given in. But I didn't want to assault her. So my hands stayed placed on her upper thighs, lightly squeezing the soft flesh there every once in a while, making our kiss more passionate each time. Or was it the other way round...? I didn't know and I couldn't even think about it much longer because Tiffany suddenly stopped kissing me, pulling away slowly, her hands still cupping my face.

And she looked into my eyes again.

The feeling in my stomach and... everywhere else in my body intensified once more.

I didn't know what I was seeing in her gaze but I knew I've never seen something like that before and I knew I was looking at her the same way in return right now.

Interpreting the look became somewhat irrelevant though when her thumbs slowly started caressing my cheeks... I saw her pink nails getting in and out of sight like a windshield wiper as I was still focusing on her beautiful, stunning eyes... they seemed to transfix me; I felt like never wanting to look away from those orbs.

I didn't care about putting into words the meaning of this.

It didn't matter.

It just had to go on.

Tiffany seemed to understand because now, she leaned in really close, breathing onto my left cheek which was still half-covered by her palm.

Slowly. Slowly.

She planted a soft kiss there. On my cheek.

Her hands slid lower and her lips followed.

Another soft peck.

And another.

And another.

I felt like blowing up, inside. Her hand reached my neck and she kissed the spot between the end of my jaw line and my neck. She teasingly kept her lips there longer than at any of the other spots before. I was shivering. *“I’m really going to explode, aren’t I?”*

“I’m breathing too loud, too unruly. This is... seriously driving me crazy.” I moved my hands up on the sides of her thighs as she moved lower and lower on my neck; my hands traveled on, on her sides, on her back, with more pressure as she sucked on my neck ever-so-lightly. Finally, my palms reached their destination in Tiffany’s hair. Her silky, silky hair, it was messed up by my fingers soon as she continued to feast on my neck, her lips devouring my skin deeper and deeper... my heart would burst any moment for sure if I didn’t stop this. I heard a moan and I knew I had to act.

‘Fany-ah.’ It took all my effort to say it without panting too much and with enough determination in my voice. Only then did I realize that the moan from earlier came from *me*. I also had to pull her head away, with my hands on the back of her neck and my thumbs supporting her jaw.

Her beautiful, long, shiny hair fell on me.

She didn’t say a word when I looked at her scoldingly. Somewhat questioningly. *“What is she doing? Where are we going with this? This was surely not just one of our casual, friendly making-out sessions. This was surely anything but what I would consider ‘casual’, let alone ‘friendly.’”*

Her eyes were fixated on mine and all I could see in them was *“please, let me do it just a bit*

more... please let me show you...” She didn’t need to say the words. I understood.

I pulled her head in and, for the first time ever, *I* was the one kissing *her* and not the other way round. She seemed mildly surprised but utterly content with this new turn of events. She moaned into my mouth as my tongue took the lead and I couldn’t help but feel my whole body tingle and my mind get clouded at this.

My fingers slid past the borders of her bra that I could feel through her dress as my palms glided down towards her waist. Once there, I grabbed hold of her and with a newly found strength, that I supposed could only come from her weakness, I threw her body off of mine. Beside me. More roughly than I intended.

The bed creaked in surprise.

Tiffany was shocked too. For a moment, she probably thought I was ending it here.

But this was only where it all began for me.

I saw a trace of eager excitement flash through her mind-numbingly beautiful features as I kneeled up on the bed and threw a leg over her torso.

The position was not exactly good though. My right knee was almost slipping off the bed, we were so much at the edge now. So I nudged her side with my knee to make her move to the left and she did. Then I secured her body between my legs and as she was about to lift up her arms to do God-only-knows-what to me, I caught hold of her hands and slowly, carefully, I intertwined our fingers.

Her eyes were boring holes into me as she stared at my face, probably examining every little movement and twitch and frown carefully while I focused on our fingers, wondering how those delicate phalanges slipping between mine could create such turbulence inside my stomach. When I never remember feeling anything *this* intense any time we held hands before.

I blew a soft kiss on the tip of her index finger.

Then, I finally turned to look at her.

And that’s when I noticed. Her eyes... her eyes were so *clear*... *Too* clear.

Her face had been flushed, yes, every time I looked at her and I naturally assumed it was because of the drinks but... now that I thought about it, I haven’t seen her drink a *sip* of alcohol tonight... Not even once.

And I'd barely drunk anything, too.

We were *both* completely sober.

Our roles were reversed now. I stared at her, letting my instincts take over while she became the one trying to figure me out now, seemingly fragile but the look in her eyes told me she wanted to be, too.

Our locked hands, that were resting near my thighs before, were slowly pushed down onto the pillows supporting Tiffany's head, by me. My upper body lowered along with it.

"I don't know what I'm doing, I really don't," I kept repeating to myself as I inched closer and closer to the girl lying under me. But since she seemed so fragile, so giving-in... I decided to be as delicate as humanly possible.

My hands pinned hers down with force though. If they wouldn't, she would attack, I knew.

"Delicate, very delicate."

I brushed some of her hair aside, placing my lips on her forehead and removing them in a very slow pace. She exhaled and seemed to relax under me.

I softly kissed her above her left eyebrow, her right eyebrow, between her brows. I felt my own pulse get stronger again. Then came the bridge of her nose. Both of her pink, heated, soft cheeks. The tip of her nose. Her cute nose I was always somewhat jealous of.

I felt her body tense up immediately as my lips left her nose.

I hovered over her full, plump lips for a moment before deciding to skip it for now, torturing myself in the process, and instead, kissing her skin right below her lower lip, the top of my upper lip briefly touching the bottom of her lower. She opened her mouth a bit as if mine was going to slip on it somehow if she did so, and as I lingered on, I felt her hands gripping mine and her body arch in towards me.

She moaned. The kind of moan that is wrapped softly within a sigh.

I knew the moment that sigh left her mouth that she really wanted me to take control. But I felt like I could be losing it anytime soon as well as my sanity, hearing these sounds from her.

I lifted my head up to admire her flawless beauty once again, trying to regain composure by

putting at least a bit of distance between us. The sight didn't help at all.

She had her eyes closed but now she slowly opened her eyelids, looking up at me with a child-like curiosity in her eyes.

And in that moment, she was not Tiffany Hwang. She was not Stephanie Young anymore either. *She...* was Hwang Miyoung now.

And the rest of the last decade or so came flooding back at me along with Hwang Miyoung.

An indescribable feeling washed through me.

'Miyoungie~?' I cooed into her left ear, while my right hand kept stroking her hair behind her ear. Her free hand stayed limp by her head.

'Yes,' she replied and my heart burst.

All along.

I should have known it.

Why didn't I?

Tiffany...

Stephanie...

Miyoung...

Right from the beginning.

I finally lost control. Or should I say I found it? Maybe both.

I looked into her eyes again, trying to convey everything I couldn't, due to my own blindness, for what seemed like a million years now, through those tiny little things we call windows of the soul. I felt like she deserved as much since she was involuntarily letting every little piece of the scenery outside slip through the blinds of her own windows too.

We just looked at one another like that for a really long time, getting lost in each other's gazes, our souls connecting wordlessly before I decided it was time. I couldn't seem to break her stare so instead, I blindly reached for the little lamp on the nightstand and turned it off.

She gasped.

‘Are you afraid?’ I asked as I felt her slightly trembling under me. I lead the back of my index and middle fingers down her smooth arms and back up.

‘No,’ she said in a half-whisper.

‘Then why are you trembling?’

‘Because I love you.’

I understood.

After all this time, after everything, she could love me. She could openly love me now and she was nervous to. So was I. But I gained strength from her weakness. One of us had to be strong, right?

The room was almost completely dark. But I could feel her eyes on me.

I used my thumbs to slowly and gently push her eyelids closed. Once again, I slipped my fingers between hers and as my body lowered the more and more, I could feel that it was not just her body trembling but her heart too. Mine beat just as crazily against hers as I finally closed my eyes and...

Our lips met.

In *our first kiss*.

In our *real* first kiss.

This was not “Tiffany’s criminally stolen” kiss. Nor “Taeyeon’s unrighteously claimed” one.

This was *our* kiss; our minds, our hearts and everything that was *us* connecting simply between two pairs of lips.

We moved in synch as if we were able to communicate somehow with our lips’ movements against each other, and in a way, we were. She told me stories of how much she’d been longing for this while I told her mine about how I will never want to do anything else in this world from now on.

Seconds, minutes and hours passed by without us knowing.

If I ever considered the word “magical” to be over the top to describe anything, well, now I found the right context to use it.

Because this, this truly felt magical, something you want to believe can exist but you convince yourself it doesn’t.

After all, maybe magic did exist, maybe I didn’t get an invitation letter to Hogwarts but I *have* found my magical world now and it was right here, in this bedroom in Seoul, Korea and the magic words were simpler to learn too.

‘I love you,’ I whispered between our slow, sensual kiss and we gradually finished our story night with a few long, descriptive sentences, wrapping up our first chapter nicely and melting into a warm embrace before letting our dreams, that now couldn’t be any better than reality, finally catch up to us.

Epilogue

‘Fany-ah~’

‘Hmm?’

‘What are you thinking?’ I asked, kissing her forehead, still breathing heavily as we laid under the soft blanket, half her body on mine as I laid on my back, barely changing the position she was in just a minute ago when she fell on top of me in exhaustion. My arm was draped around her torso, keeping her close. She had a leg over mine, her right knee pressing against my left thigh, and her arm across my chest. My heart was still thumping crazily against my ribcage. I’m sure she could feel it with her fingertips that rested lightly on top of my bosom, but I felt her rampaging heart too, pressed against my side.

Her weight felt so good on my body, I just couldn’t understand how something that’s supposed to be a burden could make you feel so light. And something that pushed you to such physical exhaustion, make you feel so energized. *“I guess I’ll have the chance to figure it all out starting from today.”* All I could tell for now is that this was amazing, a whole new world basically; probably the most amazing thing that could physically happen between two people that loved each other.

I smirked a little at the cute sight when I glanced down and saw her toes peeking out from under the covers, with her other leg being stretched out like that. She always chose nice nail polish. But I recognized this one as the one she borrowed from me just the day before yesterday.

‘I was just thinking...’ she sighed and placed her head on my shoulder, ‘you know, nine really has got to be my lucky number.’

‘Hmm.’ I moved my hand up and she shifted a little to get more comfortable, her head now resting on more of my chest. ‘Why were you thinking that?’ I caressed her cheek lightly with my thumb.

‘Well, it took nine kisses in just about nine months for you to finally come around.’

‘Hmm... if you think nine is such a lucky number, maybe we should’ve done this yesterday instead, no?’

Tiffany furrowed her brows.

I grinned, saying, ‘Since it was our 99th day—’ and got pinched. I chuckled and sighed contentedly. ‘I don’t think you can get much denser than that though, really,’ I smiled to myself. ‘Was it really the ninth? That many?’

‘Mhmm. If I hadn’t kissed you that day, we wouldn’t even be here right now...’

‘I wouldn’t be so sure about that.’ Tiffany looked at me skeptically. ‘You know, you can only mope around so long before you accidentally touch something in the dark.’

‘Meaning?’ She looked so adorable, her chin resting on me, her hair a mess and her face still flushed, looking up at me like that...

‘Meaning... if it weren’t for that kiss that night, something still would’ve opened my eyes, eventually.’

‘Oh, yeah, in another decade maybe?’ she scoffed and kept smiling as she put her head back down.

‘You’re saying it like you were so much ahead of me,’ she took my hand and started playing with my fingers. I couldn’t describe in words the feelings what simple touches like this could do to my senses. ‘It’s not like you were as fast as an ostrich or something,’ I grumbled a bit sulkily.

‘Ostrich?’ Tiffany dropped my hand as she burst out in laughter, now pushing herself up by the elbow.

‘What? Ostriches are very fast.’

‘Yeah, but really? An ostrich? Why not cheetah... or, I don’t know, a gazelle or something? Definitely something more appealing than an ostrich.’

‘Well, I was saying you *weren’t* like one, so...’

‘Whatever, Tae,’ Tiffany still chuckled as she laid back on me again, ‘well maybe I wasn’t, but *you* reminded me very much of a snail, honey.’ I pinched her shoulder for that. ‘What!’ she exclaimed. ‘I was still months ahead of you!’

‘Yeah, what, two months? That’s nothing!’

‘Well, yeah, but I’d been suspecting that maybe... you know, that maybe it was more than just attraction, to *me* at least,’ she sighed a little here, ‘*months* before that.’

‘Oh, yeah, right,’ I remembered one of our conversations from before, ‘after the fourth time, right?’

‘Nah, that was just when it finally sank in... that I was really attracted to you...’ She drew nonsensical figures with the tip of her finger on my collarbone and I felt my body tingling from her words and her touch. ‘It was after the one at the rooftop, remember?’ she stopped her movements for a moment. ‘Hey, can you scratch my back,’ she took my left hand in hers and pulled it onto her back, ‘there?’ she let go of my hand because she couldn’t reach higher. ‘A little higher, to the left— no, to the right, there!’ I scratched the spot. ‘Ahh. Thanks,’ she sighed. “*Gosh, why is everything she does so adorable?*”

‘Anytime,’ I grinned. “*Where were we again?*” ‘Wait, so you were already suspicious of your feelings for me *before* you started going out wi—’

‘Yeah, but before you try to leave a witty remark or say anything,’ she turned her face to me again, ‘just so you know, I didn’t start dating him just because of—’

‘I wasn’t even gonna say that!’ I paused for a moment and started playing with her hair absentmindedly, curling the now messy locks around my finger. ‘I know you’re not like that. But then, why did you?’

‘Well... he was also attractive,’ “*Okay, I did not necessarily want to hear that.*” ‘And he’s a *man*. You know that the thought of actually liking you in that way, even just liking a *girl* in that way was... well, much more serious than just a fleeting attraction... it was kinda *scary* and... I mean, I *did* genuinely like him,’ “*Do I really want her to go on?*” I grumbled inside my head. ‘So I gave it a shot.’ She took a strand of my hair and played with it, picking it up and dropping it back repeatedly. ‘But the more time I spent with him, the more unsure I became,’ she sighed. ‘It just felt wrong, so I broke it off. And, you know, afterwards, it became so much clearer how different... how *right* it felt... with you. So then I just had to deal with it somehow.’

‘Point is, you weren’t that much ahead of me after all. Maybe just a little more conscious about things—’

‘Point is, I still win,’ she grinned.

‘Okay,’ I sighed dramatically, ‘and you win what exactly?’

‘This,’ she kissed me softly on the lips, and I acted like I was reluctant about it though we both knew better, ‘and you know,’ she continued in “proving her point,” ‘I felt attracted to you for a

looong time before I even realized...' Another kiss followed. I smiled widely at her and she did too. She was glowing. She was the most beautiful thing on this planet. 'And... before that... I just thought you were really cool' a peck, 'and cute' and another, 'and just generally amazing,' she said, meeting my gaze. My face was blushing thoroughly.

'You seemed pretty amazing to me too, actually. I still love to hear you speak English, you know that, right?'

'*Yeah, I know,*' she said in English as she beamed down at me. 'Would you say you'd already fallen for my charms back then?' she winked and grinned at me cheekily.

'I guess so, but I wouldn't have known, really,' her hair fell on my shoulder like a dark curtain closing out the outside world. It was only us in this world. Only Tiffany, only Taeyeon. I raked my fingers through her silky hair, following my finger's movements with my eyes in the dim light. 'I hadn't really looked at anyone that way back then. You know that. It felt a bit like an innocent crush, I guess, but because you're a girl, I just... didn't really see it... maybe I didn't even *want* to see it for what it was. You?'

'Hmm. I gotta say that looking back, it makes more sense why I was so enthusiastic about you and all,' Tiffany chuckled.

'Well, you were pretty enthusiastic about everything and everyone back then.' "*Well, pretty much still the same now...*"

'Yeah, but *super* enthusiastic about a certain shy girl from Jeonju called Kim Taeyeon. I was practically fangirling over you! I remember I was so glad that we got to be roommates...' I had to laugh at that. We weren't exactly the perfect roommates back then. As we got closer and learnt much more about each other, it turned way better though. 'But, at the time, I suppose I didn't even consider it could be anything else. I just looked at you as a friend.'

'What about now?'

'Still as a friend?' she said with an innocent expression. A mischievous smirk formed on her lips as I frowned at her. Then she kissed me. 'As a member?' I pinched her, and she chuckled, laying her lips on me one more time, a bit longer now. 'As a lover?' she kissed me again, even longer this time, her lips dancing across mine while I was murmuring, 'now that sounds better' with a content little smile. 'As a soulmate?' she half-whispered and her voice sent shivers down my spine. The good kinds. I pulled her in by the head for a longer kiss, a deeper one.

Then the meaning of the words sank in and I felt butterflies come alive in me again. I kissed her even more tenderly than before and she followed my lead. My left hand kept her head close

to me while my right turned to slowly run up her sides, her soft, bare skin feeling warm under my palm. The curves of her body made me want to explore her every millimeter. I tugged at her lower lip. 'I love you,' I said as our lips parted for a moment.

'I love you too,' she breathed heavily between another long and deep kiss. She broke it abruptly then. 'How about you?' she asked with a sudden curiosity in her eyes.

'Huh?' I asked as I placed a kiss on her neck now.

'How do you see me?'

I paused. That was a very hard question. How could I put into words what she was to me? 'I see you...' I said and kissed her lips gently, and thought "*I see you everywhere, no matter what or when or how, you're all I see*" 'I see you' I repeated, 'as my past' my lips found hers easily and savored the feeling of their softness for a moment before pulling slightly away, 'my present' I closed the gap between us again, relishing the unyielding heat as our tongues met momentarily, 'and my future.' She kissed me with a new-found vigor.

Yes, that's what I was sure about. There was still so much ahead of us and I didn't know how we were going to do it, I didn't know how much we'll lose for this, or how much we'll have to pay, I didn't know if there will ever come a day when we'll be accepted. All I knew, is that I was grateful for that one little kiss that night that led up to what we'd become now, for her opening up to me and letting me see things for what they were. She was right, if it weren't for her revelation and wordless confessions that night, I might've needed another few years to come to terms with my feelings for her and act. Who knows what could've happened by then? Maybe she would've been taken by then... or married even... my brain and my heart just wouldn't cooperate to picture the possibility of a future without her.

I stopped kissing her for a moment, and looked into her eyes deeply, willing my own ones to convey every bit of emotion that was surging through me in that moment. I was drawn in by her gaze and once again, I could feel the overwhelming sense of connection that I felt that night. Not through words, nor through physical gestures, like kissing. Those were secondary.

This emotional connection could only be seen through the eyes of Kim Taeyeon and Tiffany Hwang, and only in the eyes of the other. It was invisible to anyone else. It was what kept me going, kept me breathing, what made my heart beat hard against my chest. It was the one that answered all my questions and gifted me an eternal curiosity to see what lies ahead for us, together. This connection, this *love* made me fulfilled, whole, complete and round, this is what made me what I always have been and forever will be: a part of her, and most importantly, an eternally and irreversibly inseparable part of *us*.



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